New Europe Writers

Edited by
Lidia Vianu

Bucharest Tales







Contemporary
Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Press Release Bucharest, Friday 18 April 2014

New Europe Writers

Bucharest Tales

ISBN 978-606-8592-48-0

Edited by Lidia Vianu

Life behind the Curtain...

Contemporary Literature Press is publishing now a second volume in the series **New Europe Writers**. The first one was the three-language volume *Warsaw Tales*, which the graduate students of the MA Programme for the Translation of the Contemporary Literary Text translated into Romanian. It appeared in English,

Contemporary Literature Press publică acum un al doilea volum din seria **New Europe Writers**. Primul a fost volumul trilingv *Warsaw Tales*, apărut în engleză, română şi polonă şi tradus în româneşte de masteranzii în Traducerea Textului Literar Contemporan.

Bucharest Tales, care poate de azi fi citită şi online, a fost tradusă în limba engleză, în parte, dar şi sub-

Romanian and Polish. *Bucharest Tales*, which becomes available to online readers now, was sub-edited, proofread, illustrated and partly translated into English by graduates of the same MA Programme.

The series New Europe Writers began in 2005, and already has five books: Tales from Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Budapest, and Ljubljana. It was started by **John a'Beckett** (born in Australia, living in Warsaw), **James G. Coon** (born in the United States, having lived for ten years in Poland, currently located in Bangkok), and **Andrew Fincham**—English poet.

The aim of New Europe Writers—whose Facebook group totals no less than 700 writers from all over the world!—is to "capture the spirit of a united Europe". Since our publishing house specializes in Joyce Lexicography, and is therefore highly interested in the European spirit and languages, we befriended NEW instantly.

John and Andy visited us in Bucharest when they were beginning to put *Bucharest Tales*

editată, corectată şi ilustrată de studenții aceluiaşi MTTLC.

Seria New Europe Writers a debutat în anul 2005 şi a ajuns la al cincilea volum: Povestiri din Varşovia, Praga, Bucureşti, Budapesta şi Liubliana. Fondatorii acestui proiect sunt **John a'Beckett** (născut în Australia, el locuieşte în prezent la Varşovia), **James G. Coon** (născut în Statele Unite, a locuit în Polonia timp de zece ani, iar acum se află la Bangkok) şi **Andrew Fincham**—poet englez. Pagina New Europe Writers pe Facebook are peste 700 de membri, scriitori din întreaga lume.

Intenția acestui proiect a fost de la bun început să promoveze imaginea unei "Europe unite". Editura noastră este specializată în Lexicografie Joyce, ceea ce înseamnă implicit că vede Europa cum o vedea James Joyce—adică unită spiritual şi lingvistic. Era firesc, prin urmare, să avem foarte multe lucuri în comun cu NEW.

John şi Andy au vizitat masteranzii MTTLC la Bucureşti atunci când au început să lucreze la *Bucharest Tales*. Masteranzii urmau să traducă textele scriitorilor români în limba engleză—ceea ce au şi făcut. Cartea pe

together. The book we are publishing now is a collection of stories and poems about old and new Bucharest, written by Romanian writers of two generations, and by foreigners who have come to know Romania and its capital.

The five books NEW has published so far come to support the conviction that Europeans are bound to understand one another and stick together, like one big family. James Joyce himself would have enjoyed these five books "dedicated to the Travelling Reader", to "life behind the Curtain", written for a *voyeur* who is eager to peep in.

care *Contemporary Literature Press* o publică acum este alcătuită din povestiri şi poeme despre noul şi vechiul Bucureşti, scrise de poeţi şi prozatori români din două generaţii diferite, precum şi de scriitori din alte ţări care au călătorit ori au trăit în România.

Cele cinci cărţi de până acum ale grupului NEW sunt o dovadă că europenii sunt toţi o mare familie. Ideea unor cărţi dedicate "cititorului călător", ideea perdelelor trase deoparte tocmai ca să atragă un *voyeur* "dornic să se uite înăuntru" ar fi fost fără îndoială şi pe placul lui James Joyce.

Bucharest, 11 April 2014

Lidia Vianu

New Europe Writers

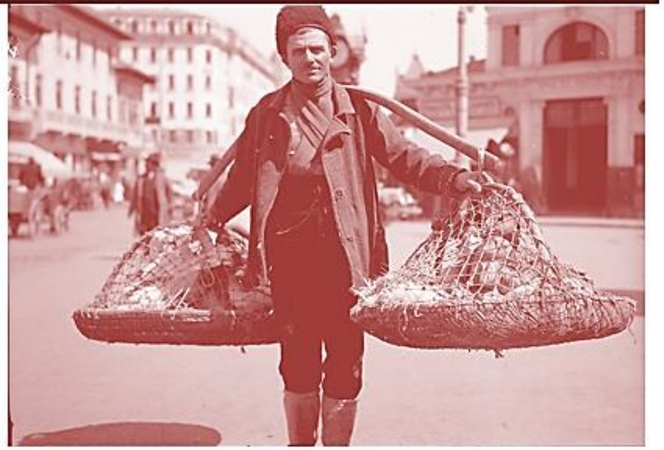
Edited by

Lidia Vianu

Bucharest Tales







Contemporary Literature Press

http://editura.mttlc.ro

Bucureşti 2014

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro

Director: LIDIA VIANU

Executive Advisor: GEORGE SANDULESCU

Contemporary Literature Press

Editura pentru Studiul Limbii Engleze prin Literatură

BRITISH COUNCIL
UNIVERSITATEA DIN BUCUREŞTI VIRTUTE ET SAPIENTIA
INSTITUTUL CULTURAL ROMÂN
Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland
Ambasada Irlandei

The only online Literature Publishing House of the University of Bucharest

ISBN 978-606-8592-48-0

Cover, and overall Layout: **Lidia Vianu.**

Subediting: Bianca Zbarcea.
Proofreading: Aida Birghilă, Irina Borţoi, Bianca Zbarcea.
Illustrations: Lidia Vianu, Bianca Zbarcea.
IT Expertise: Simona Sămulescu.
Publicity: Violeta Baroană.

Translators: Fleur Adcock, Alistair Ian Blyth, Andrew Elliott, Jean Harris, Mike Ormsby, Philip Orr, Paul Sohar, Adam J. Sorkin, Elena Armă, Florin Bican, Alina Miron, Gabriela Moateru, Zenovia Popa, Constantin Roman, Ştefan Stoenescu, Grete Tartler, Lidia Vianu.
Revision: Lidia Vianu.

New Europe Writers

Bucharest Tales

Edited by Lidia Vianu

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

A Collection of
Central European Contemporary Writing

This book is dedicated to the Travelling Reader.

Voyeur

Always keep
your curtains open
(just to see
who's looking
in).

In 2005, New Europe Writers began a ten year project to capture the spirit of a united Europe.

Centred on a city, each volume presents essential contemporary writing from new and established authors that captures the vitality and variety of this dynamic place and time.

Bucharest Tales is the fourth of these anthologies, providing a panoramic insight into the Carpathian Garden and beyond: Don't visit us without it!

New Europe Writers. Your Guide to life behind the Curtain...

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Table of Contents

Editorial Note			p. 13
Florin Bican:	Penguins	Pinguinii	p. 14
Flavia Cosma:	My City in the Morning		p. 24
Dan Lungu:	Mr. Escu's Adventure.	Aventura bucureşteană a domnului Escu	p. 26
Adrian Păunescu:	Antiprimavera	Antiprimăvară	p. 32
Igor Isakovski:	Bucharest 5 ½		p. 34
JoAnne Growney:	Looking for Words		p. 36
David Hill:	Great Street		p. 38
David Hill:	Religious Vision		p. 40
Sándor Kányádi:	The Ambulance		p. 41
Doina Ruşti:	Bill Clinton's Hand	Mâna lui Bill Clinton	p. 42
ioan es. pop:	15 olteț street, room 305	oltețului 15, camera 305	p. 51

Mike Ormsby:	Democracy	Democrație	p. 55
Grete Tartler:	The Violin-Maker	Lutierul	p. 63
Stelian Tănase:	Zgaiba		p. 64
Ioana Ieronim:	Madonna and Elvis		p. 73
Dan Dănilă:	Ella at Free Europe		p. 75
Mike Ormsby:	Mother Tongue		p. 77
Paul Sohar:	The Tram in the Old City		p. 85
Ioana Ieronim:	Church on Wheels		p. 86
Christopher Bakken:	Strada C. A. Rosetti		p. 87
Ion Munteanu:	Home	Poemul casei	p. 91
Helena Drysdale:	Ana, Camil, Niculina, and Me		p. 92
Carmen Firan:	The Farce	Farsa	p. 97
Călin Torsan:	The Scent of Love	Parfum de dragoste	p. 115
Denisa Comănescu:	Anamorphosis	Anamorfoză	p. 121
Jennifer Robertson:	The Seacoasts of Bessarabia		p. 123
Denisa Comănescu:	Remember	Remember	p. 129
JoAnne Growney:	The Bear Cave		p. 130
Andrew Fincham:	Uncle Dint and the Protochronists		p. 131

Grete Tartler:	At the Racecourse	La hipodrom	p. 141
Constantin Preda:	Sadová Winter	Iarnă la Sadova	p. 143
Bogdan Suceavă:	A Journey around the World	O călătorie în jurul lumii	p. 145
Simona Popescu:	Open Sesame	Sesam, deschide-te!	p. 163
Mircea Cărtărescu:	Where Lemon Trees Bloom	Cunoşti tu ţara unde înfloresc lămâii?	p. 173
James G. Coon:	Cenotaph		p. 175
Jennifer Robertson:	The Street Sweeper		p. 184
Grete Tartler:	Opus mulierum	Opus mulierum	p. 190
Lucian Dan Teodorovici:	Chewing Gum	Gumă de mestecat	p. 192
Dan Mircea Cipariu:	Bunjee jumping	Bunjee jumping	p. 212
Raluca Rodica Raţiu:	A Story within a Story		p. 214
Bogdan Suceavă:	Can One Hear the Shape of a Drum?	Să auzi forma unei tobe	p. 216
Nick Drake:	Ceauşescu's Daughter's Bedroom		p. 230
Mike Ormsby:	The Promised Land		p. 234
Paul Sohar:	Hiking in the Harghita		p. 244
Andrew Fincham:	Azuga		p. 246
Grete Tartler:	July	Iulie	p. 247
Saviana Stănescu:	Stolen Taste		p. 248

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

A. Bo:	Instant Man		p. 255
Traian T. Coşovei:	Let It Rain!	Să plouă!	p. 257
Ioana-Raluca Răducanu:	Love's Labours' Lost		p. 259
Ionel Riţi:	Epitaph		p. 260
Notes on contributors			p. 261

Editorial Note

This is the fourth annual collection of 'Tales' assembled from the writings of New Europe. It continues a wider project that seeks to quicken an interest in both traditions and cultures through the stories and poetry of those who have experienced the developments of the past two decades.

As in life, the anthologist learns lessons. This volume contains pieces old and new, by new and established writers; those who have spent a lifetime, a previous lifetime or merely part of their lives in the region now called Romania.

This pocket collection for the travelling reader appears at a time when there is something of a festival of contemporary Romanian Literature in English translation, as reflected in the rise of literary periodicals. The Editors would like to acknowledge with gratitude the courtesy and assistance forthcoming from **Florin Bican** of the Romanian Cultural Institute and Professor **Lidia Vianu** and her translators at MTTLC (MA Programme for the Translation of the Contemporary Literary Text), Bucharest University. We are also indebted to the experienced advice of **Jean Harris** and **Dan Cipariu**.

As collage is not a suitable medium to replicate a single detailed image, so this collection introduces tales to provide a taste of place, and a reason to look further into the extraordinary lands known as Romania. And there's not a vampire to be found anywhere.

(Or perhaps just one…)

Safe travels!

Andrew Fincham
James G. Coon
John a'Beckett
The Editors, New Europe Writers

Florin Bican

Pinguinii

— Da’ ce-s, domne, cu pinguinii ăştia?

Noul venit îşi face loc până-n faţă printre cei câţiva curioşi şovăielnici, care s-au strâns pe malul lacului. Se uită toţi la pinguini în tăcere, de la o distanţă pe care o percep de comun acord ca sigură, deşi criteriile acelei siguranţe nu le sunt nici lor prea clare. Pinguinii nu par să prezinte o ameninţare imediată. Oricum, nu la adresa integrităţii fizice a privitorilor, chiar dacă le pun vizibil la încercare integritatea psihică. Toţi tac, până când noul venit continuă:

— Că adineorea cân’ trecui cătră mausoleu să mă duc la circa financiară — arată cu degetul spre dosarul subţire pe care-l cară într-o pungă de plastic — nu era-n parc nici picior de pinguin…

— I-o fi adus de la primărie, bombăne critic un pensionar cu şapcă de baseball şi ochelari groşi.

Penguins

‘What’s them penguins doin’ here?’

The newcomer elbows his way to the front through the bunch of hesitant bystanders gathered expectantly by the pond. They’re all watching the penguins in silence from a distance they seem to perceive in one accord as safe, though they’re not altogether edified as to the criteria of that safety. The penguins do not seem to pose an immediate threat. At any rate, not as far as the onlookers’ physical integrity is concerned, though their psychological integrity is obviously put to the test. They hold their collective peace until the newcomer resumes.

‘Just moments ago I ain’t seen no hint of a penguin as I was headin’ for the mausoleum on my way to the tax department.’ He points apologetically to the flimsy file he totes in an even flimsier plastic bag.

‘Them boffins at the city hall must’ve brought ‘em,’ a senior citizen in a baseball cap and thick glasses volunteers

Sugestia este îmbrățișată fără rezerve.

—Dom'le, ăştia nu mai ştie pe ce să mai arunce cu banii, se revoltă un privitor a cărui plasă cu cumpărături trădează practicarea unei economii domestice austere. Păi pinguini ne treb'e nouă?

—Ne trebuie cum ne-au trebuit şi palmierii, i se alătură alt cetățean supărat pe primărie, un domn îmbrăcat îngrijit, care până acum a privit pinguinii pe cont propriu. Ce ne trebuia nouă palmieri în Bucureşti? Suntem în Africa?

—Ee, intervine hâtru un muncitor în salopetă, dacă mai dă ăştia banii pe palmieri şi pe pinguini, chiar c-ajungem ca-n Africa — umblăm în curu' gol…

—Da, domne, da' pinguinii nu trăieşte-n Africa. Trăieşte la Polu' Nord, rectifică scrupulos pensionarul cu ochelari groşi.

—N-are nimic. O să umblăm în curu' gol şi iarna.

Râsete aprobatoare. Pinguinii rămân indiferenți, imobili cu excepția unor scurte frisoane care par să-i dezechilibreze temporar, făcându-i să-şi deschidă cu câteva grade sărăciile de aripioare pentru a-şi recăpăta poziția verticală.

critically. The suggestion meets with universal approval.

'They'd splurge on whatever crap takes their fancy,' another voices his indignation. He dangles by his side a lean string bag, transparently testifying to the practice of a meagre domestic economy. 'Is it really penguins we need, of all things?'

'We need them like we needed the palm trees,' a neatly-dressed citizen apparently at odds with the city hall joins in. So far he's been watching the penguins from a space of his own. 'What good are palm trees in Bucharest, may I ask? We're not in Africa, are we?'

'My,' a worker decked in overalls chimes in, 'if them blokes keep spendin' lolly on palm trees an' penguins, we'll end up like Africans, goin' about bare-arsed…'

'Penguins don't live in Africa, mate. They live at the north Pole,' the thick-glassed senior citizen scrupulously rectifies.

'Same diff'rence,' the worker pacifies him. 'We'll go bare-arsed summer *and* winter.'

Approving laughter. The penguins remain indifferent. They're motionless except for the odd shiver that seems to throw them briefly off balance, forcing them to open their vestigial wings just a tiny fraction in order to keep their

— Li-i frig, observă cu simpatie noul venit.

— Dacă acu' li-i frig, nu se lasă muncitorul, la iarnă văd ei pe dracu'.

— Lasă, nu le duce grija, îl linişteşte un bunicuţ cu faţa blajină. Că le cumpără primăria şi mantale de iarnă…

— Şi căciuli, bre, se bagă-n vorbă un ţigan tânăr, infiltrat pe nesimţite în grup.

— Nu există, dom'le, intervine autoritar purtătorul de şapcă şi ochelari. Păi ăşti-ai făcuţi să rezişte la… minus cincizeci de grade, sau cât o fi acolo la Polul Nord. Unde-ai mai văzut mata' pinguin îmbrăcat? Nici la circ…

— Hai că la circ aş mai zice, consimte cumpărătorul auster. Sau la grădina zoologică. Da-n Parcu' Libertăţii?

— Nu-i mai zice Libertăţii, îl corectează prompt ochelaristul. Acu' e Parcu' Carol.

— Chiar aşa, domne, de ce s-o fi apucat să-i şchimbe numele? se interesează gospodarul care trecuse spre circa financiară.

— Păi dacă aşa-i zicea înainte, îl lămureşte bunicuţul blajin. Că-i de pe vremea regelui. Comuniştii i-a zis Libertăţii.

vertical position.

'They're cold…' the newcomer remarks in sympathy.

'If they're cold now,' the worker presses on, 'wait till winter comes — *that*'ll give 'em hell.'

'Not to worry,' a gentle-faced grandpa puts him at ease. 'The city hall will buy them nice warm parkas...'

'An' fur caps, what,' a young Gypsy horns in. No one's noticed his infiltration of the group.

'No way,' the senior citizen cuts him off with authority. 'Them birds is meant to take… minus fifty degrees, or whatever the temperature is down there at the North Pole. Wherever have you seen penguins wearing clothes? Not even at the circus…'

'Now bringing penguins to the circus would make some sense,' the sombre shopper agrees. 'Or to the zoo. But what's the point of dumping them in Liberty Park?'

'Ain't called 'Liberty' no more,' senior rebukes him. 'It's 'Carol Park' now.'

'Quite… Why on earth did they go an' change its name?' enquires the joker from the tax department.

'Coz that's what it used to be called before,' the gentle grandpa puts him right. 'It goes all the way back to King Carol's days. It was the communists called it 'Liberty Park'.'

—Şi-acu' ce-o să facă regele? O să şi-l revendice şi pe ăsta?, nu se poate stăpâni domnul îmbrăcat îngrijit.

—Ai încurcat-o dacă-i retrocedează ăştia parcul regelui, îl zgândăre muncitorul pe omul cu dosar. Că n-o s-o mai poţi tăia p-aici când ai treabă la circa financiară. Trebuie să ocoleşti tocma' pe sus, pe la crematoriu… Râde singur.

—Nu se mai satură, mormăie cel cu plasa. Nu e clar dacă se referă la familia regală sau la circa financiară.

O mamaie se apropie de grup, împingând anevoie un copil într-un cărucior cu roţi scâlciate.

—Uite, mamaie, pinguinii, îşi îmbie ea nepoţelul să-şi ridice privirea de la biscuitele pe care-l morfoleşte absent. Pinguinii, mamaie, mai încearcă ea o dată, după care se resemnează şi-şi odihneşte singură privirile pe păsăroii neverosimili.

—Da' ce-s cu pinguinii ăştia aici?, se interesează ea şoptit într-un târziu. Bărbaţii ridică prudent din umeri.

—Oare-o fi buni de mâncat?, meditează cu voce tare ţiganul cel tânăr.

—Da' ce, bă, s-a terminat lebedele la Viena?, îl împunge muncitorul.

'I wonder what the king will do now. Claim it back?' snaps the neatly-dressed man.

'You'll be in a right fix if they let the king have his park back,' the worker eggs on the tax man. 'Bang goes your shortcut to the tax department. You'll have to go all the way around the crematorium grounds …' He laughs at his own joke.

'Can't seem ever to have enough…' the shopper mutters. It's not clear whether he means the royal family or the tax department. Or the crematorium…

A wizened grandma harnessed to a wobbly-wheeled pushchair accommodating an overgrown baby ploughs her way towards the group.

'Looky-looky, baby, the penguins,' she's trying to lure her charge away from the biscuit on which it's munching absently. 'Penguins, baby,' she makes a further attempt before settling resignedly to rest her eyes on the incongruous birds.

'What's them penguins doin' here, huh?' she asks at length, in a whisper. The men shrug noncommittally.

'Are they any good to eat?' the young Gypsy meditates aloud.

'How come? They've run out of swans in Vienna, is it? An' now you want to eat our penguins, eh?' the worker picks

—Nu, bre, da' zic, se apără țiganul. Baremi ouli…

—V-ați dat dracu', nu-l iartă muncitorul. Oole dă găină nu mai vă place. Acu' vreți oo dă pinguin…

—Dacă-i democrație…, comentează criptic cel cu plasa.

—Chiar, dom'le, dacă i-a adus să-i bage la f'un supermarket şi-a scăpat de la abator?, îşi dă cu părerea cel cu circa financiară.

—Noo, i-ar fi adus gata congelați…, declară expert domnul îmbrăcat îngrijit.

—Înainte stăteam toată noaptea la coadă pentru o pungă de frații Petreuş şi-acu bagă pinguini la discreție, se minunează mamaia.

—Păi vezi, mamaie, că-i bine-n capitalism?, prinde țiganul curaj. C-un pinguin de ăsta faci de mâncare la tot familionu'.

—Bă, pentru voi e bine tot timpul, i-o retează muncitorul. Nici comuniştii n-a avut ce să vă facă.

—Da, dom'le, da' atunci era disciplină, dă din cap cu

on him.

'Jus' wonderin',' the Gypsy defends himself. 'The eggs, at least…'

'Fussy lot you are, too,' the worker corners him relentlessly. 'Them chicken eggs won't do for you no more. Now you go for penguin eggs…'

'That's democracy for ya!,' comes the cryptic comment of the string bag man.

'Hey, what if they brought them for some supermarket an' they escaped from the abattoir?' the tax man volunteers.

'No way. They'd have brought them frozen.' An expert opinion from the well-dressed gentleman.

'Time was, we used to queue up all night for a bag of them frozen undersized chickens that came in pairs, an' now they're shippin' in penguins by the herd,' the grandma marvels.

'See, Lady?' the Gypsy picks up emboldened. 'With one of them penguins you could cook a week's worth of grub for your whole clan. Ain't capitalism good, hey?'

'For those of your ilk everything's good all the time,' the worker cuts him short. 'Not even the communists could do any harm to the likes of you.'

'Still, there used to be discipline back then,' the old

energică nostalgie pensionarul cu şapcă şi ochelari, stârnind aprobarea tacită a spectatorilor.

O mămică turnată-ntr-un impecabil taior bleumarin se propagă sacadat pe tocuri în josul aleii, târând cu o mână un băieţel care se poticneşte ritmic încercând să ţină pasul cu ea, în timp ce în cealaltă mână agită nervos cheile de la maşină.

—Pinguianu', aaa, pinguianu'!, se opreşte băieţelul pe călcâie, mâncând din ochi păsările impasibile. Forţa de tracţiune a mamei, care priveşte neabătut înainte, îl readuce însă pe traiectoria corectă.

—Hai dragă odată, că-ntârzie mami la firmă.

—Pinguinu', strigă în urma ei mai mulţi privitori, solidarizându-se spontan cu băieţelul.

—Pinguin e mă-ta!, le scuipă ea printre dinţi, continuând să privească înainte şi despicând peisajul cu plastronul imaculat al ţâţelor sale scrobite.

Toţi tac. Până şi muncitorul ridică nedumerit din umeri. Doar mamaia întreabă:

—Ce-a zis, ce-a zis?

timer pushed back his baseball cap, and nods nostalgically, to the silent approval of the onlookers.

A young mother cast in an impeccable dark blue business suit rhythmically propels herself on high heels down the park path, in one hand a little boy who stumbles in time with her strides trying to keep pace, and in the other a rattling set of car keys.

'*Penguan*, hey, *penguan*,' the little boy breaks her progress by planting his heels in the tarmac, then feasts enchanted eyes on the impassive birds. The maternal traction force uproots him, and drags him back on course as the woman careers on, looking neither left nor right.

'Move on, laddy, Mummy's running late for her meeting.'

'Penguin ahoy!' several onlookers call after her in spontaneous solidarity with the little boy.

'Your mum's a penguin, pillock!' The woman slices the words through her teeth as she clickety-clacks purposefully through the landscape with her immaculate breastplate of starched boobs. Everyone's at a loss for words.

Even the worker shrugs his shoulders in defeat. Grandma keeps asking:

'What'd she say, what'd she say?'

—Domne, da' dacă-s extratereştri?, propune bunicuțul blajin.

—N-are cum, decide pensionarul atoateştiitor. Unde-i nava care-a venit cu ea?

—A pitit-o-n boscheți, încearcă țiganul să întrețină ipoteza întâlnirilor de gradul trei.

—Să mori tu, i-o retează muncitorul. Nu te duci să le-o ciordeşti?

Un freamăt brusc zburleşte pâlcul de pinguini, ca şi cum i-ar fi alarmat insinuarea muncitorului.

—Ia!, dau să se mire privitorii, dar în clipă următoare li se dezvăluie sursa freamătului. Un boschetar minor se apropiase tiptil de pinguini cu o prăjină şi se pregătea să-l altoiască pe cel mai la îndemână.

—Bă! Lasă bă pinguinii-n pace, ce ți-a făcut?, îl admonestează mulțimea. 'Rea-ț-ai dreacu' dă aurolaci…

Boschetarul leapădă prăjina cu resemnare şi ocolind cu fereală păsările încă agitate, se integrează în grupul de oameni, făcând slalom printre cele câteva palme ridicate într-o amenințare formală. Dar necum să se potolească. Culege de pe jos o piatră şi se pregăteşte să dea cu ea după pinguini. Muncitorul îl depistează la timp şi-l păleşte părintesc-

'What if they're extraterrestrials, huh?' the grandpa proffers.

'Can't be,' the omniscient baseball cap decrees. 'Where's the spaceship they came in?'

'They hid it in the bushes'. Gypsy attempts to uphold the close-encounters-of-the-third-degree hypothesis.

'Wanna bet? the worker cuts him short. 'Then why don't you nick it?'

A sudden stir ruffles the flurry of penguins as if the worker's insinuation has given them cause for alarm.

'What the…' The onlookers succumb to bewilderment for a moment. It doesn't take them long, however, to detect the true source of the commotion. A bored kid has sneaked behind the penguins with a long stick and is belting the one within easiest reach.

'Let them penguins alone! What'd they ever do to you?' the crowd admonishes him. 'Fuckin' glue sniffers…'

The kid drops his stick in resignation and giving a wide berth to the still twitchy birds, slinks into the pack of humans careful to avoid the odd hand raised in token reprimand. He doesn't give up the idea, though. He picks a stone from the ground and prepares to lob it at the penguins. The worker detects him in time and swipes. The juvenile delinquent drops

muncitoreşte după ceafă. Copilul lasă piatra şi-o tuleşte din mijlocul lor. Când se asigură că nu-l urmăreşte nimeni, se opreşte, se întoarce spre ei, trage aer în piept cu premeditare şi strigă cât îl ţin puterile:

—Muie la pinguini!

Apoi fuge mai departe.

—Eu zic c-ar trebui să chemăm poliţia, propune purtătorul de dosar.

—Dă-l dreacu' dă aurolac, se strâmbă muncitorul.

—Nu dom'le pentru ăla, se disculpă autorul propunerii. Pentru pinguini.

—Da ce să le facă poliţia?, se interesează retoric domnul cel îngrijit.

—Să constate, susţine ochelaristul iniţiativa.

—Vezi să nu, îl descurajează muncitorul.

—Poliţia comunitară, dom'le?, intonează sceptic cel cu plasa. Păi ăştia ia banii statului degeaba, dom'le…

—Chemaţi-i, chemaţi-i, le dă muncitorul ghes. Că poate-i sterilizează. Ce, vreţi să se prăsească pinguinii-n Bucureşti ca câinii bagabonţi?

the stone and is off like a shot. As soon as he's sure no one's following him, he comes to a halt, turns to the group, draws a huge breath and calls out at the top of his voice:

'Fuck the penguins! Then he runs off.

'What about calling the police?' the tax man breaks the silence.

'The little bugger's not worth it,' the worker pulls a sickened face.

'I don't mean for the kid,' the proponent elucidates. 'For the penguins.'

'And what should the police do, if I may ask?' the neatly-dressed gentleman enquires rhetorically.

'Investigate,' Baseball know-all hastens to support the initiative.

'Investigate my arse,' the worker dissuades him.

'The local police, huh?' the man with the string bag intones sceptically. 'All they do is get paid by our taxes for doin' nothing…'

'Call them, go on,' the worker urges them. 'They might realise them birds need to be sterilized. You don't want Bucharest teemin' with penguins like it's teemin' with stray

—Care vagabonzi, dom'le? Comunitari — aşa le zice, restabileşte ochelaristul corectitudinea politică.

—A-îîî, dă muncitorul să-şi exprime părerea, când o nouă comoție în rândul pinguinilor le atrage atenția.

O tânără îmbrăcată uşchit s-a apropiat foarte mult de pinguini şi-i priveşte cu ochii zgâiți.

—Ai grijă, domnişoară, nu te-apropia prea tare, că ăştia-i periculoşi, o previne muncitorul.

—Te muşcă de vuvuzelă, explicitează țiganul. Ceilalți îl privesc dezaprobator. Domnişoara îi ignoră pe toți şi pleacă. După plecarea ei, se revine la subiect.

—De anunțat poliția, trebuie s-o anunțăm, conchide omul cu dosarul. Că-i sterilizează, că-i arestează, că-i eutanasiază — treaba lor. Noi ne-am făcut datoria…

—O anunțăm, cad toți de acord, în afară de țigan care dispare grăbit printre copaci, şi pornesc fiecare spre diversele ieşiri ale parcului, cu consemnul ca primul care s-o întâlni cu poliția să-i spună.

dogs…'

'What d'ya mean, stray? Free-rangin' urban dogs is what they're called,' the baseball cap makes his bid for political correctness.

'Free-rangin' my arse' the worker attempts to voice his opinion, but a new stir among the penguins draws everyone's attention.

An eccentrically-dressed young girl has come quite close to the penguins and watches them, eyes popping out of their sockets.

'Watch it, Miss, don't get too near. Them's dangerous.'

'They'll bite your ocarina off,' the Gypsy expounds. The others watch him, eyes cold with disapproval. The young girl ignores them all and leaves. As soon as she's gone, they pick up the topic.

'We gotta call the police,' the tax man concludes. 'Whether they sterilize, euthanatize or arrest them — that's their business. We've done our duty…'

'Let's call them, then,' everyone consents, though apparently not the Gypsy, who makes himself scarce among the trees. They all disperse towards the various park gates having agreed that the first one to encounter the police should report the penguins.

Şi ori că nu s-au întâlnit, ori că s-au întâlnit şi nu i-au spus, ori că i-au spus şi poliţia nu i-a crezut, nu se ştie… Cert e că poliţia *a constatat* când era prea târziu ca să mai poată *întreprinde* ceva.

Cei care-şi mai amintesc Bucureştiul înainte de invazia pinguinilor, şi puţini sunt aceia, vorbesc despre un oraş liniştit, cu străzi largi şi cu oameni prietenoşi, în care puteai ieşi din casă când voiai şi te puteai plimba peste tot după pofta inimii. Astăzi până şi inscripţiile care odinioară acopereau toate zidurile de-abia se mai desluşesc: MUIE LA PINGUINI…



Could be they never encountered the police, or they encountered them and failed to pass the information along, or maybe they did pass on the information and the police didn't believe them — we can't be sure. One thing is certain, though. The police started *investigating* when it was too late to embark upon any expedient course of action.

Those who can still remember Bucharest before the penguins, (and a dwindling tribe they are), talk about a peaceful city with welcoming streets and friendly people. A city where you could go out whenever you pleased and were free to roam to your heart's content. Today, the graffiti that once shouted from every wall have faded to barely legible pleas: FUCK THE PENGUINS…

[Translated into English by the author]



Flavia Cosma

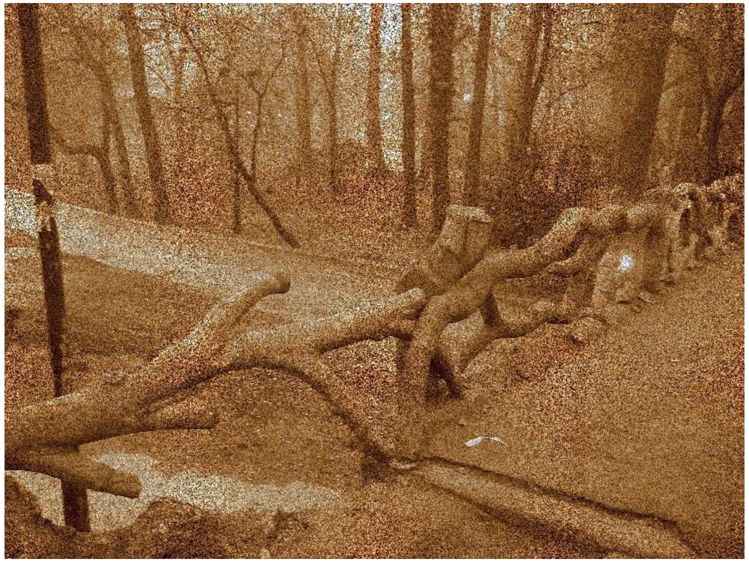
My City in the Morning



Its baroque eyelashes still obscured
By the vapid, nocturnal turmoil,
My city rises from sleep in the morning,
To the acrid smell of taverns
Opened too early,
Where garrulous, dirty drunks
Resume their heated quarrels.

My city awakens at dawn,
In the suave perfume of flowers clouded by dust;
Those tender, resigned cupolas, waiting
For the midday summer sun, to ooze over them.

Bent backs and furrowed foreheads,
Large crowds trotting on the sidewalks,
Greet each other absent-minded, on the fly,



Hurrying on, forgetting their pitiable heritage, their history,
When, thirsty for blood, their ancestors,
Greedily slaughtered each other,
—In the name of mother country and of different Gods—,
Under the shadows of rival cathedrals.

It took me a long time to be able to discern
The time corroded voice of my city,
But today I understand its madness and its error;
I cross it lovingly, with a lithe step,
And I am saddened by the sight of lifeless, white kittens,
Lying on the pavement, snuffed out by the spirits of the night,
Red poppies blossoming from their muzzles,
In the morning light.

[Written in English]

Dan Lungu

Aventura bucureşteană a domnului Escu



Într-o marți, domnul Escu, în şlapi şi fluierând vesel, a ieşit din casă pentru a cumpăra o pâine şi din greşeală a ajuns la Bucureşti. I-a fost atât de lene să se întoarcă, încât a rămas acolo, unde şi-a întemeiat o familie, a găsit un serviciu şi, între timp, a rămas şomer. Mereu i s-a părut că oraşul acela e plin de ministere, autobuze, statui şi oameni grăbiți, însă cu greu

Mr. Escu's adventure



One Tuesday, Mr. Escu, in his flip-flops and whistling cheerfully, left his house to buy a loaf of bread and ended up in Bucharest by mistake. The prospect of returning triggered such sloth in him, that he resolved to stay in the Romanian capital, where he since raised a family, found himself a job and has recently become unemployed. He'd always

găseşti un colţ liniştit unde să faci pipi.

Cu toate că şi-a cumpărat pălărie şi cravată, nimeni n-a vrut să-l angajeze, aşa că a trăit în continuare fericit în sânul familiei. La un moment dat, un tip cu un dinte lipsă şi unul de aur i-a spus că-l plăteşte să stea opt ore pe zi într-un picior, însă l-a refuzat fiindcă nu-i plăcea faţa lui. Pentru a nu pierde contactul cu realitatea, a început să iasă la berăria din colţ, unde în scurt timp şi-a făcut o groază de prieteni, oameni şi câini. Cel mai des păstra contactul cu realitatea împreună cu domnul Ov şi domnul Ovici, aflaţi provizoriu în Bucureşti şi dornici de afirmare. De fapt, domnul Ov era în drum spre Paris, unde intenţiona să-şi desăvârşească sistemul filosofic, însă simţise nevoia unui popas fenomenologic. Acestui domn îi plăceau papanaşii şi Calea Victoriei, pe care se plimbau femei cu sânii umflaţi până sub barbă, ca nişte amigdalite uriaşe. În schimb, domnul Ovici e colecţionar de oraşe. După ce le vizitează, le pune în piept ca pe nişte medalii. Desigur, e un tip distins, doarme cu papion la pijama, însă după două beri devine porc, pretinzând că Bucureştiul e o mână de turci, una de greci şi armeni, iar restul sunt ţigani, ţărani şi alte chestii cu ţ. În zadar domnul Ov încearcă să-l contrazică, pentru că dl Ovici îl trage

entertained the idea that, though Bucharest was full of ministries, buses, statues and people on the run, you could barely find a quiet corner in which to pee.

Despite his fitting himself out in a hat and tie, nobody would hire him, so he continued to live happily amongst his loved ones. At one point, some gap-toothed guy (who also had visible a golden tooth) offered to sponsor his standing on one leg for eight hours, but Mr. Escu turned him down because he didn't like his face. In order to keep in touch with reality, he began to patronise the corner pub where he quickly struck up friendships with the regulars and also with dogs. His companions in his endeavour were especially Mr. Ov and Mr. Ovici, temporarily living in Bucharest and eager to make themselves known in the capital. Mr. Ov was actually on his way to Paris, where he intended to perfect his philosophical system, but he had felt the need for a phenomenological stop-over. This gentleman liked two things: *papanaşi* and Calea Victoriei, where the strolling women's mountainous breasts reached their chins, resembling huge pairs of swollen tonsils. Mr. Ovici, on the other hand, collected towns. Having visited them, he would place them on his chest as if they were medals. He slept with bow tie and pyjamas, he cut the dapper dash of a proper gent, indeed, but, after a couple of beers he

de ureche până îl bagă cu nasul în bere şi-i spune:

—Numele meu e mai lung, aşa că eu am dreptate.

Desigur, dl Ov n-a fost dintotdeauna filosof, a avut şi zile mai bune. În cea mai circulată variantă a biografiei sale, lucrurile stau în felul următor: într-o după-amiază, pe la 17 şi 13 minute, din senin şi-a spus: privite de sus, toate lucrurile devin filosofice. În prima zi de după această descoperire, domnul Ov a căutat un bloc cu zece etaje, s-a instalat într-un fotoliu de răchită şi a început să mediteze într-o poziție consacrată istoric, cu degetul la tâmplă. Dar toate generalizările la scara unu pe zece i s-au părut provinciale. Atunci s-a urcat în tren, a venit la Bucureşti şi s-a urcat pe Hotelul Intercontinental, dându-se mecanic de întreținere. Deşi bătea un vânt infernal, a rezistat fix 21 de minute. Oricum, a avut timp să-şi dea seama că nici scara 1 la 22 nu e satisfăcătoare, mai ales că nu e o cifră rotundă şi a intrat într-o berărie, unde i-a cunoscut pe dl Escu şi dl Ovici, oameni care nu i-au

would sink into the gross behaviour of a xenophobic pig, claiming that Bucharest was nothing more than a handful of Turks, Greeks Armenians and sundry Gypsies, peasants and sundry things beginning with p. Mr. Ov would try to contradict him, but to no avail. When he heard that, Mr Ovici simply pulled his ear, jammed his nose into the beer, and stated:

'My surname is longer, so I'm always right.'

Of course, Mr. Ov hadn't always been a philosopher, he'd seen better days. The best known version of his biography runs something like this: one afternoon, at about 5:13, out of the blue, he told himself: seen from above, everything becomes philosophical. The first day after this revelation, Mr. Ov looked for a ten-storey building, settled himself into a wicker armchair and began meditating in a historical position—his finger to his forehead. Nevertheless, every generalization on a scale from one to ten appeared to him rather provincial. That's when he took the train, came to Bucharest and swept into The Intercontinental Hotel, passing himself off as a maintenance mechanic. Although a hellish wind was blowing, he stood out there for more than 21 minutes. That gave him time to realize that neither was the 1 to 22 scale very satisfying, especially as it was not a round

schimbat viaţa. Deşi nu e tocmai frumos din partea noastră, haideţi să vedem ce se va întâmpla în viitor. Profund nemulţumit, va învăţa să împletească coşuri de nuiele, va câştiga bani şi se va duce în ţara lui Descartes, pe turnul Eiffel, ca să-şi desăvîrşească teoria relativă a generalizării. Va fi iarnă şi Parisul va fi de necuprins. În plus, degetul de la tâmplă îi va degera şi în jumătate de an îi va fi amputat. Decepţionat şi agnostic, timp de zece ani îşi va amâna sinuciderea de pe o zi pe alta. Apoi se va plictisi şi va intra în politică. Apoi va deveni director la Combinatul de creştere şi îngrăşare a porcilor, nu departe de localitatea sa natală.

Dar deocamdată e la Bucureşti, oraşul cu prea puţine străzi şi prea multe personalităţi. Afară plouă, iar el, împreună cu dl Escu şi dl Ovici, discută cu pasiune despre orice. Nu există lucru pe lumea asta pentru care el să nu fie capabil să facă o teorie, cu excepţia chibriturilor, pe care nu le poate suferi din naştere. Dacă n-ar fi inventat altcineva bricheta, cu siguranţă ar fi făcut-o el. Dar, în fine, asta e altă poveste. În opinia sa, Bucureştiul miroase a pâine, în timp ce în restul ţării toate

number. Consequently, he stepped into the nearest beer house, where he met Mr. Escu and Mr. Ovici, two men who had no effect on his life whatsoever. Indiscreet though it may be, let us see what the future has in store for him. Deeply disappointed, he will learn how to make wicker baskets, earn money and visit Descartes' country, more precisely the Eiffel Tower, where he will perfect his own Relative Theory of Generalization. It will be wintertime and Paris will be beyond all expectations. Moreover, the finger he holds to his forehead will freeze and half a year later it will be amputated. Disenchanted and agnostic, he will postpone his own suicide from one day to the next for ten years. Then he will be thoroughly bored and will go into politics. Afterwards he will be appointed manager of the industrial farm that raises and fattens swine, not far from his own native town.

But, for now, he is in Bucharest, the town with far too few streets and too many personalities. It's raining outside, and he, together with Mr. Escu and Mr. Ovici, will talk passionately just about anything. He can produce a theory for every little trifle in this world, except matches, which he has always hated, his entire life. Had the lighter not been already invented, he'd've invented it himself. But that's another story. In his opinion Bucharest smells like bread, while throughout

statuile sunt sculptate în mămăligă, iar singura competență reală a bucureştenilor este capacitatea de a ghici ce autobuz la ce minister merge. Dl Ov, colecționarul, crede că, dimpotrivă, văzut de sus oraşul seamănă cu o pată de benzină sau, în cel mai bun caz, cu o turmă de iepuri, fiecare de altă culoare.

De aici, o întreagă ceartă. Dl Escu, în loc să arbitreze această dispută, se simte jignit şi în consecință se apucă să-şi taie unghiile, după care adoarme. Foarte rău, fiindcă cearta degenerează într-o păruială, iar el pierde un spectacol pe cinste şi va trebui să se milogească la chelner pentru a i-l povesti.

În schimb, fără să bage de seamă, a doua zi dimineață viața dlui Escu a luat o întorsătură neaşteptată. Pe la 5 şi 13 minute, nici nu s-a trezit bine şi mâna sa stângă a început să bolborosească ruseşte. Crezând că netoata vorbeşte prin somn, s-a grăbit să o bage sub jetul de apă rece de la chiuvetă, dar în zadar. Peste puțin timp, mâna stângă a început şi ea să vorbească într-o limbă sucită, pesemne turceşte. Apoi un picior bâigui bulgăreşte, iar celălalt se văicărea în greceşte. Ca un făcut, o ureche prinse a ciripi în cumană, iar cealaltă în latină. Domnul Escu s-a fâstâcit şi, pentru o clipă, a crezut că a înghițit din greşeală turnul Babel. Cum soția vorbea la telefon de trei zile cu sora ei plecată în Italia, trebuia să se descurce singur.

the rest of the country all the statues are carved in polenta, and the only real skill the citizens of Bucharest can boast of is their ability to guess which bus goes to what ministry. On the contrary, Mr. Ov, the collector, believes that the town seen from above resembles a gas stain or, at best, a flock of rabbits, a different colour each.

A debate ensues. Mr. Escu, instead of arbitrating it, feels offended and consequently focuses on cutting his nails, after which he falls asleep. A fatal move: the argument turns into a scuffle and he is missing one hell of a show and will later on have to beg the waiter to tell him the whole story.

Instead, without his knowing it, the following morning, Mr. Escu's life takes an unexpected turn. At about 5:13, barely awake, his left hand begins to mumble in Russian. Thinking the old dodo is talking in its sleep, he immediately puts it under the cold water jet from the sink, but, alas, it's all in vain. Before long, his left hand also begins to talk in an awkward language, probably Turkish. Then one leg starts to stutter in Bulgarian while the other one whines in Greek. And to top it all, one ear begins chirping in the Cuman language and the other one in Latin. Mr. Escu loses his countenance and, for a split second, believes he has mistakenly swallowed The Tower of Babel. As his wife has been talking on the phone to

Din disperare a strănutat de trei ori, iar nasul i-a spus „Shalom!”. S-a speriat şi a supt o bomboană de mentă, gândindu-se că dacă află vecinii îl vor prinde şi îl vor vinde la circ. Aşa că şi-a făcut repejor bagajele şi s-a dus la aeroport, cu gândul să-i lase pe Ov şi pe Ovici bucureşteni în locul său. Dar acolo nu vorbeau decât în engleză şi n-au vrut să-l creadă că e bucureştean get beget.

Aşa că a început să fluiere şi s-a dus să cumpere o pâine.

her sister in Italy for the past three days, he finds he must extricate himself from this situation. In despair, he sneezes three times, and his nose says ‘Shalom!’ He is scared and sucks on a mint drop: he fears his neighbours, if they find him out, will promptly kidnap him and sell him to the circus. So he quickly packs his stuff and heads for the airport, content to leave Ov and Ovici behind, as citizens of Bucharest in his place. But they only speak English at the airport, so they refuse to believe he was born and bred in Bucharest.

So, cheerfully whistling, he proceeds to purchase his fundamental loaf of bread.

[Translated into English by Alina Miron]





Adrian Păunescu

Antiprimăvară

Ce dacă vine primăvara
Atâta iarnă e în noi
Că martie se poate duce
Cu toți cocorii înapoi

În noi e loc numai de iarnă
Vom îngheța sub ultim ger
Orbecăind pe copci de gheață
Ca un stingher spre alt stingher.

Şi vin din patriile calde
Cocorii toamnei ce trecu
Şi cuiburi şi-au făcut la streşini
Şi lângă mine nu eşti tu

Ninsori mai grave decât moartea

Antiprimavera

So what if Spring comes?
There's so much winter left in us
That March and the migrating cranes
Can turn around and travel back

In us there's space only for winter
We'll freeze under the final frost.
Trying to find our way on thin ice
One man alone towards another

And from the warmer countries come
The cranes of last Fall
And make nests under troofs
But next to me there is no you.

Snows worse than death

Au fost şi sunt şi vor mai fi
La mine-n suflet este vifor
Şi vin nebuni să facă schi.

Şi ninge până la prăsele
Ninsoarea-mi intră-n trupul tot
Un dans de oameni de zăpadă
Ce îmbrăţişarea n-o mai pot

La noi e iarnă pe vecie
Doi foşti nefericiţi amanţi
Ia-ţi înflorirea, primăvară
Şi toţi cocorii emigranţi.

Have been, still are, will come again
It's blizzard in my soul
And crazy people come to ski.

The snows reach us the deep inside
They take over our bodies
A dance of snowmen
Which hugging can no more

In us there's winter for eternity
Former unhappy lovers
Take all your blossoms, Spring
And also your migrating cranes!

[Translated into English by Constantin Roman]





Igor Isakovski

Bucharest 5 ½



Bucharest at five—
my new shoes at the door.

Bucharest, five and a half
seagulls liberated from weight
sun bashfully undressing

Bucharest, replete and beautiful
shamelessly colourful, with scented concrete

Bucharest, seven and a half
the last leis before the first flight tonight
and I pour Irish from the bag too:
we should invent an honourable withdrawal

Bucharest, late afternoon
escorts me with a storm—



last night I was sitting at a terrace
and watched the seagulls
lighting up the sky:
white stripes freed of meaning
now I have more Irish than water
and not a penny left
we should invent a proud retreat

Bucharest late afternoon
strolls me through Eliade's labyrinths
too much literature in one day
I slowly withdraw
I leave the scene with a gentle bow—
yet another city I will return to
Bucharest at dusk
June deep necklines small firm breasts
with salmon chased by white seagulls

[Translated from Macedonian into English by the author
with Elizabeta Bakovska]

JoAnne Growney

Looking for Words



Our land and words are one, Romania explains.
To help me understand, friends take me
through Transylvania, land of Dracula
and ancient painted monasteries.

To help me understand, friends take me
in a van with sleeping bags, a store of food,
to visit ancient monasteries painted
with sacred stories to last forever.

We travel in a van, carry picnic food,
marvel at unfading lapis on concrete walls
sacred stories saved to tell forever
pastel lift to heaven, red descent to hell.

We marvel at unfading lapis on concrete walls
spiritual instruction for those who have no books:



pastel lift to heaven, red descent to hell
and, at the nuns' clear windows, bright geraniums.

Instructing those who have no books
through Transylvania, land of Dracula
nuns brighten clear windows with red geraniums.
Our land and words are one Romania explains.

[Written in English]

David Hill



Great Street

Climb up into the tram, and stamp your ticket,
And if you want to grab a seat, move fast;
Adjust your purse so nobody can nick it,
And watch the filthy city gliding past.

Admire the grey identical high rises,
All filed against the smog, ten storeys tall,
Each window with its freight of dull surprises,
A different life behind each patch of wall.

A thousand women hanging out old dresses
Or cooking stew for families of five,
All with insanely complex home addresses,
All grimly or deliciously alive.

Oh, how can country folk call cities boring?
How can they say they're cold and inhumane?



Doesn't this vision send your spirit soaring?
Doesn't this squalid scene bewitch your brain?

Oh look, here comes the best part. Hold on tightly.
The tram will shake a little, you'll observe.
Because it has to change direction slightly,
The whole majestic street begins to curve;

And, like the graceful sweep of some god's pencil,
These proud decaying blocks, ten storeys high,
Unite into a single blunt utensil
To score a huge half-circle on the sky!

[Written in English]

David Hill

Religious vision



And as we speak, two trolleybuses lurch
Around the corner, past the painted church.
Through grimy windows, an enlightening show:
Large, pious matrons, packed into the aisle,
All let go of the handrail for a while
To cross themselves with stout right arms. That done,
They grab the rail again. But ah, too slow!
They topple sideways. All behave as one,
Like frantic crabs nibbling the undertow,
Like smuggled parrots jostling on their perch.
The same religious vision, end to end,
Twice over. One for me, one for my friend.

[Written in English]

Sándor Kányádi

The Ambulance



It’s not in the streets but inside us that
it goes racing with sirens blazing,
it’s inside us that the lights are changing
from red to green; the eyelids bat
and the pupils’ traffic lights
give us the go-ahead with great
relief, seeing that the accident
did not even make us late.
When it turns green, with the right-of-way
of the righteous enjoying heaven’s reprieve,
we rescue ourselves across the street
— on the crosswalk where we can play
it safe — the only place where, even if we died,
for once we’d have the law on our side.

[Translated from Hungarian into English by Paul Sohar]

Doina Ruşti

Mâna lui Bill Clinton

Ţinuse acest bilet ani în şir, într-o casetă metalică, cumpărată cândva cu bomboane, o cutie ovală, cu două cununițe de trandafiri pictate pe capac. Multă vreme îl păstrase ca să-l arate prietenilor, cu orgoliul posesorului de bunătăți, gândindu-se la el ca la cea mai mare valoare trecută, prezentă şi viitoare. În perioada liceului avea câțiva prieteni care veneau duminicile pe la el şi care îl întrebau, aşa cum se întrebă despre animalele de companie, "Ce-ți mai face Clintonul? Îl mai ai? Nu s-a şters pixul?" Se decolorase el puțin, dar era acolo, la fel de impresionant şi de viu ca în ziua de iulie. Apoi, pe măsură ce timpul se dezbrăca de amintiri, petecul de hârtie căzu şi el sub geana lânoasă a uitării.

Dar chiar şi-acolo, într-o minusculă capsulă, mai păstrează încă tăria celui mai teribil timp. Pe la sfârşitul clasei a şasea era deja cineva. În foşnetul luminos al anilor 90, se vede

Bill Clinton's Hand

He'd kept the note for years on end in a metallic oval box with two rose circlets painted on its lid, purchased once in exchange for candies. He'd treasured it for years, showing it off to his friends, his vanity as possessor of goodies amply gratified, treating it as an all-time asset. In high-school, some of his friends would come by his house on Sundays and ask him, just as one does with pets: 'How's your Clinton? Still got it? Hasn't the writing been blotted out?'. Actually it had been smudged a bit but was still there, as imposing and alive as that day in July. However, as time shed its memories, so did the scrap of paper fall into the soft twirl of oblivion.

Yet even there, the pint-size capsule still retained the intensity of those harrowing days. By the end of sixth grade, he was already famous. In the bright rustle of the '90s, he

încă, plutind nimbat peste Piața Universității. Luase un premiu internațional, iar lumea începuse să-l cheme pe la tot felul de întruniri selecte, aniversări, comemorări şi chiar la prezentări de modă, unde cânta la flaut ca un maestru. Însă de departe evenimentul cel mai important a fost întâlnirea cu Bill Clinton.

El şi-o studentă, premiată pentru un soft deştept, au fost aleşi să stea alături de preşedintele Americii, ca doi stâlpi inconturnabili ai națiunii române.

Încă mult înainte, îl anunțase directoarea, chemându-l în biroul ei, de la Şcoala de Muzică, apoi tipul de la SRI şi încă alți câțiva indivizi, care îi ştiau numele întreg şi toate realizările lui de flautist care abia împlinise 12 ani. "Artistul nostru, Vizitiu Octavian", spunea directoarea, "o să ne reprezinte în fața lui Bill Clinton!" Iar el se şi vedea trăgând de-un lanț argintiu toată Şcoala de Muzică, aşezată în şir indian, de la colegul de bancă, până la d-na Atanasiu, directoarea blondă ca o păpădie. Însuşi preşedintele Emil Constantinescu îi ştia numele, iar după aceea chiar şi babele de pe strada lui cârâiau pe la ferestre "Octa-Octa", deşi până în acea vară, care fusese cu totul şi cu totul a lui Bill Clinton, ele nici măcar nu auziseră de el. Ziua de vineri, 11 iulie, a anului 1997, încă străluceşte, ca

could see his halo hovering above University Square. He'd received an international award; and invitations to all kinds of select reunions, anniversaries, celebrations and even fashion shows were flooding in, and he played his flute there masterfully. Yet the peak of his celebrity was to have met Bill Clinton.

He and a female student who'd received a prize for developing some smart software program were finally selected to flank the American President as two solid pillars of the Romanian nation.

Long before the event, in the Music School principal's office, he'd been informed of his role, first by the headmistress, then by a guy from the Romanian Intelligence Service, accompanied by a few of blokes who actually knew his full name, that he'd just turned twelve and was already an accomplished flutist. 'Vizitiu Octavian, our artist', the school principal proclaimed, 'is going to represent us when Bill Clinton comes!' And he would picture himself dragging by a silver chain his fellow students, from his desk mate to the blonde-as a-dandelion school principal, Mrs. Atanasiu. All in an Indian file. Even President Emil Constantinescu himself knew his name, and all the old crones in his street would squawk outside their windows 'Octa-Octa', although

orice lucruşor obsolescent, închis într-un sipet de aur, pe care mâinile emoţionate ale colecţionarului îl deschid o dată pe an.

Pe Bulevardul Bălcescu, în inima Capitalei, a fost ridicată o tribună, iar de la Intercontinental până la Piaţa Romană, strada s-a transformat într-o mare de steguleţe cu stele albe şi de capete inflamate, care slobozeau urale periodic, sub soarele de iulie. Ferestrele blocurilor din jur erau camuflate ca în timp de război, căci pe la fiecare uşă trecuse cineva şi le spusese tuturor să ţină geamurile acoperite.

—Nimeni n-are voie să se-apropie de ferestre la mai puţin de un metru!

—În casa mea! Ce-o să-mi faci dumneata în casa mea, că doar nu mai suntem pe vremea comuniştilor!?

—Dacă încălcaţi interdicţia veţi fi împuşcaţi pe loc!

Aşa că ferestrele păreau toate îndoliate, acoperite cu storuri şi perdele groase spre care privea poate câte un ochi înfricoşat sau curios, dar nu într-atâta încât să stea înfipt în

until the summer when Bill Clinton came they had never heard of him Adam. That Friday, 11 July 1997 still shines in all its tiny obsolescence, locked away in a gold coffer which the collector's nervous hands open only once a year.

A platform was erected on Bălcescu Boulevard, in the heart of the Capital, and, stretching from The Intercontinental Hotel to Piaţa Romană, the entire street turned into a sea of little white-starred flags and wild minds which unleashed endless cheers into that hot July sun. The surrounding windows of apartment blocks were camouflaged as in times of war; someone had knocked on every apartment door and had told everyone to keep their windows covered.

'Nobody's allowed within one metre of the window!'

'In my own house! Who are you to order me about in my own house?! We're not under the Communist regime any more!'

'If you break the interdiction order, you will be shot on the spot!'

So all the windows took on a mournful aspect, covered by thick curtains and blinds; terror-stricken or curious eyes glanced briefly at the window, motionless in the stifling

geam, ci doar încremenit în umbra asfixiată a camerei.

La tribuna improvizată, tapetată cu steagurile celor două țări, n-au urcat decât patru persoane: Bill Clinton, Emil Constantinescu, softista premiată şi Octa. În spatele pupitrului erau aşezate trei jilțuri albe, iar la oarecare distanță o băncuță îmbrăcată în mătase, pregătită special pentru micul flautist.

Studenta a ținut un scurt speech de bun venit, urmat de strigăte şi aplauze, al căror ecou s-a ridicat în soare până la etajul 25 al Intercontinentalului. Era o după-amiază de aramă, iar pe deasupra bulevardului care, din cauza stegulețelor agitate, părea un câmp de clematite, se simțea din când în când expirația asfaltului încins.

Rolul lui era ca, imediat după studentă, să-i spună două propoziții celui mai puternic cetățean al lumii şi să-i strângă mâna. Însă, în exaltarea generală, care cuprinsese tot bulevardul, şi-a dat seama că uitase discursul. Creierul îi era gol, iar în vârful urechilor pulsa toată viața amplă a acelei zile de iulie. Nici măcar nu s-a putut ridica de pe băncuța tapițată cu mătase de China şi nici măcar nu şi-a mişcat ceafa de pe steagul național, întins pe copertina din spatele tribunei. Fața lui, de bucureştean bronzat, a umplut camerele miilor de

dark room.

Only four people mounted the improvised platform, decorated with the flags of the two countries: Bill Clinton, Emil Constantinescu, the awarded student and Octa. Behind the speaker's podium stood three white seats and, a little farther away, a silk-adorned little bench, especially prepared for the young flutist.

The student made a brief welcome speech, followed by cheers and applause whose echoes rose to the sun and reached the 25th floor of the Intercontinental Hotel. It was a coppery afternoon, and above the boulevard which looked like a field of clematis because of the myriad little waving flags you could occasionally sense the intermittent waft of burning asphalt.

Octa's role: after the student had finished her speech, he would address a couple of sentences to the most powerful citizen of the world and then shake his hand. However, in the heat of the moment which had seized the entire boulevard, Octa realized he had forgotten his own speech. His mind was blank and the intense life of that July day was throbbing in his red ears. He could neither rise from the China silk-covered little bench, nor move his nape off the national flag, spread as it was on the sun-blind behind the

televiziuni şi pentru două secunde bune toată lumea care îl venera pe Bill Clinton, nu doar din cartierele Capitalei ori de prin coclaurile Carpaţilor, dar şi din Arkansas şi chiar din Insulele Capului Verde, aflase de existenţa lui Octavian Vizitiu, nu neapărat ca purtător de nume, ci ca faţă încremenită pe fâşia galbenă a tricolorului românesc. Alături simţea genunchiul tremurător al softistei, iar dincolo de ea auzea râsul lui Bill, întrerupt de cuvinte al căror sens îi trecea în viteză pe lângă urechi.

În emoţia generală, Octa părea destins şi zâmbitor ca un erou. Cât a vorbit Emil Constantinescu, a încercat să-şi revină, căutându-l din ochi pe tipul care îl adusese la tribună şi din a cărui siluetă înfăşurată în haine negre, nu vedea decât ceafa încununată de un cablu ondulat.

Apoi, în minutele cocoşate şi chinuite, cât a durat discursul lui Emil, lumea din jur s-a luminat ca un ecran de cea mai bună calitate. Degetele albe ale lui Bill Clinton, faţa prietenoasă a unui tip răsărit din senin lângă braţul lui, spânzurat cu neglijenţă pe balustrada tribunei, în sfârşit, ciripitul softistei, care se apucase să se rupă-n figuri pe tema succeselor ei, toate amănuntele astea intraseră lent în scoarţa

podium. His tanned face filled the cameras of thousands of TV channels and, for two whole seconds, everyone who worshipped Bill Clinton—not just the inhabitants of the Capital or those in the tiny villages in the Carpathians, but also those of Arkansas and even of the Island of Cape Verde—saw Octavian Vizitiu, not necessarily speaking, they saw him as a spellbound face against the yellow strip of the Romanian flag. He could feel the student's trembling knee next to him, and, beyond her, Bill's laughter was interrupted by words whose meaning fleetingly escaped him.

In the general excitement, Octa had the relaxed and smiling countenance of a hero. During Emil Constantinescu's speech he tried to compose himself while his eyes searched for the guy who had ushered him to the podium—a silhouette in a black suit, just the nape of a neck crowned with a microphone spiral.

Then Emil made his speech, and it lasted for a number of painful minutes during which all the faces there lit up like a top-notch screen. Bill Clinton's white fingers, the friendly face of a guy who had just popped up next to his arm, carelessly hanging on the rail around the podium, and, finally, the student' suave bragging of her achievements, all of this had slowly seeped into his brain cortex, and later on

lui cerebrală, rulând-se apoi şi derulându-se ori de câte ori avea chef să rememoreze cel mai însemnat eveniment din viaţa sa.

Iar în centrul întregii întâmplări se afla mâna luminoasă şi precipitată a lui Bill Clinton.

Nu-l văzuse când şi de unde scosese mica agendă. Dar prinsese, mai întâi în coada ochiului, mişcarea agitată şi apoi îl privise direct. Clinton scria repede cu vârful apos al unui pix. În mijlocul lumii care fremăta de-a lungul Bulevardului Bălcescu, între zecile de uniforme negre ale sepepiştilor îngrămădiţi pe lângă tribună, pe mica scenă din scânduri şi în culcuşul de steaguri mătăsoase, Bill Clinton scria un bilet, iar mâna lui, vârful nasului luminat, mişcarea discretă a genunchiului de lângă el, dar şi propria siluetă, cu braţul ca o franzelă, tolănit pe balustradă, şi cu adidaşii bălăngănindu-se deasupra lemnului auriu, toate aceste frânturi de viaţă, preced, în amintirile lui Octa, miezul dens al zilei de 11 iulie. În aerul ca o răsuflare de câine, se mişcau frunzele teiului de pe trotuar, iar fiecare răsucire verde şi prăfoasă intră chiar şi acum în fruntea şi în culisele ochilor încremeniţi în amintiri.

Bill Clinton a întins spre el petecul de hârtie, apoi s-a ridicat să-şi ţină discursul. Bulevardul tremura de urletele

he would unfold them whenever he felt like remembering the most significant moment of his life.

And, at the centre of it all, shone Bill Clinton's bright, swift hand.

When and how Clinton had extracted his small agenda, Octa had no clue. He saw the agitated movement out of the corner of his eye and then he turned his full gaze on him. Clinton was dashing something down with a ball-point pen. In the hustle and bustle along Bălcescu Boulevard, among the dozens of black uniforms of the Protection and Guard officers clustering around the podium, on the small planked stage and in the lair of silky flags, Bill Clinton was writing a note: his hand, the tip of his bright nose, the discreet movement of the knee next to him, and also his own silhouette, his arm looking like a thin loaf of white bread resting on the rail, his sneakers flapping above the golden wood, all these incidents precede, in Octa's memories, that momentous 11 July noon. The leaves of the linden tree on the pavement were beating like a dog's swift breath: each green and dusty puff comes back to life in Octa's mind and in his eyes lost in memories.

Bill Clinton handed him the scrap of paper, after which he rose to make his speech. The boulevard shook with the

bucuroase ale lumii, iar softista îl tot înghiontea să dea biletul omului zâmbitor, care răsărise lângă parapetul tribunei. Înțelesese din prima ce avea de făcut, însă ceafa lui continua să stea lipită de pânza tricolorului, iar mâna stângă, de pe balustradă, dormita fără grijă. Bărbatul zâmbea încă, ridicându-şi sprâncenele sub vizieră. Era evident că aşteaptă hârtiuța galbenă, ştia că el este destinatarul, o ştia şi softista premiată, dar şi Octa însuşi procesase această informație în creierul care fremăta intens, la adăpostul unui craniu toropit pe pânza steagului. Vocea lui Bill Clinton răsuna în microfon, dublată de un nevăzut translator, în timp ce în spatele lui, pe divanul mătăsos, se vede încă pe sine, o pată neagră, încremenită în tricolorul României, şi-şi aminteşte încă degetele mâinii drepte, încleştate pe micul bilet, în aşteptarea următorului gest, şi pentru el impredictibil.

Când preşedintele Americii şi-a terminat speech-ul, bărbatul zâmbitor se afla deja pe scenă. Într-un mod miraculos, trecuse peste balustradă sau urcase treptele în viteză. În vuietul general, pe când Bill Clinton dispărea înghițit de escorta oficială, mâna cafenie a lui Octavian Vizitiu continua să strângă biletul galben. Iar în mişcarea de corpuri, pe când marele miting se desfăcea în grupuşoare, omul, care îşi pierduse zâmbetul, l-a ridicat în sfârşit de pe bancheta lucioasă şi din

crowd's cheerful roars; the student kept nudging him to hand the paper to the smiling man who had appeared next to the podium rail. He knew immediately what he had to do, but the nape of his neck remained glued to the flag's canvas, while his left hand lay dormant on the rail. The man was still smiling, raising his eyebrows under his visor. He was obviously waiting for the little sheet of yellow paper, aware he was its recipient; that student knew it too. Octa himself had also registered fact this in his humming brain, sheltered by a torpid skull pasted to the flag. Bill Clinton's voice rang into the microphone, doubled by an invisible interpreter while, behind him, on the silky divan Octa can still see himself, a black spot imprinted onto the Romanian flag, and he can still remember his right hand's fingers clenching that little note, waiting for the next unpredictable gesture.

When the U.S. president finished his speech, the smiling man was already on stage. He had miraculously passed the rail and had swiftly climbed the stairs. In the general commotion, as Bill Clinton disappeared, engulfed by the official escort, Octavian Vizitiu's brown hand was still clenching that yellow piece of paper. In that thronging crowd, as the big assembly was breaking into smaller groups, the man who had finally forgotten how to smile,

două mişcări, al căror efect şi-l mai aduce încă aminte, i-a descleştat pumnul şi i-a smuls hârtiuța deja umedă.

În jurul lor se perindau brațe, capete şi steaguri de hârtie, iar Octa continua să înregistreze în coada ochiului câte-o răbufnire somnoroasă prin coroana teiului de pe trotuar.

Când s-a hotărât să plece, în jur se limpezise. Pe podelele tribunei rămăsese un afiş îndoit, iar câteva perechi de pantofi se mişcau pe lângă pupitru. A coborât cu grijă cele două trepte, ca şi cum s-ar fi întors din cer. Iar când a dat cu ochii de asfaltul înmuiat, l-a izbit nu suflul fin al gudronului, nu urma unui toc elegant, de damă, şi nici rămăşițele unui steag agitat prea energic. Ci un petec găbui, din care răzbătea imperativ culoarea de păcură a unui pix prezidențial. Între rămăşițele petrecerii, doar cuvintele scrise mai aminteau substanța reală a unui eveniment pe care el îl ratase, iar apariția lor acolo, printre gunoaie, îi dădea sentimentul vag că fuseseră scrise numai pentru el.

Octa a cules de pe jos hârtia, iar la prima atingere i s-a părut ceva mai scorțoasă. Poate că nu scăpase din buzunarul

lifted him off the shiny bench and, with two short movements whose effect he can still remember, unclenched his fist and snatched the wet scrap of paper.

Human arms, heads and paper flags kept floating around them; Octa's eye was still registering a sleepy gust now and then through the top of the linden tree on the pavement.

When he finally decided to leave, everything around him had been cleared away. Only a crumpled poster had remained on the floor; several pairs of shoes were shuffling around the podium. He carefully descended the two steps, as if he were returning from the sky. And when he his gaze met with the melting asphalt, what struck him wasn't the tar's soft waft; neither was it the imprint of an elegant woman's high-heeled shoe, nor the remains of a broken flag. What did strike him was a yellow and on it the black colour of a presidential ball-point pen. Among the remains of the party, only those written words still reminded him of the real substance of an event he had ruined, and the fact that they were there, in the garbage, gave him the vague feeling they had been meant for him in the first place.

Octa picked up the paper and felt it was a bit rough. Perhaps it hadn't slipped out the masked satrap's pocket. In

satrapului mascat. În răsuflarea opărită alți fluturaşi galbeni se ridicară pentru o clipă de pe fața bulevardului.

Iar când, în sfârşit, putu să se mişte spre metrou, deasupra pieței, pustiite la comandă, se auziră frunzele teiului înecat în praf.

Pe biletul găsit într-un iulie vechi, se mai poate desluşi şi astăzi o mică înfloritură ca un fulger, care ar putea să fie de la orice. Însă în porii nevăzuți ai hârtiei pluteşte încă mâna unui preşedinte american.

the scalding heat, other yellow butterflies rose for an instant above the boulevard.

And when he was finally able to head for the subway station, the leaves of the dust-filled linden tree hummed above the square, as if ordered to scatter.

On the note found on a July day long ago, a small flourish, resembling a flash of lightning, is still discernible today, though it could mean anything. However, the paper still holds the touch of an American president's hand.

[Translated into English by Alina Miron]





ioan es. pop

olteţului 15, camera 305

1.
ca o amară, mare pasăre marină,
nenorocul pluteşte peste căminele de nefamilişti
din strada olteţului 15.

aici nu stau decât doar cei ca noi. aici
viaţa se bea şi moartea se uită.

şi nu se ştie niciodată cine pe cine, cine cu
cine şi când şi la ce.
doar vântul aduce uneori miros de fum şi zgomot de arme
dinspre câmpiile catalaunice.

când urci la noi, amice, ai grijă: la uşă o să te întâmpine păduchele de san-josé. e paznic aici, o să ţi se gudure la

15 olteţ street, room 305

1.
like a huge, bitter seabird
misfortune hovers over the block of flats
at 15 Olteţ street.

only those like us live in these rooms. no families. here
life gets swigged down, death forgotten.

and no one ever knows who or whom, who with
whom, when or what for.
sometimes the wind blows the smell of smoke and the tumult of battle
from the catalonian plain.

when you come up to see us, buddy, watch out: you'll be met at the doorway by the san-josé louse. he's our keeper. he'll wag

picioare, o să-ți zică dă-mi nene cinci lei să te trec apa, uşa e-nchisă, ăştia mă lasă tot timpul afară, m-au întemnițat afară.

tu nu-l crede, amice, tu nu ştii, a venit ieri administratorul
l-a făcut şef peste tot palierul, el este cel care cârmuieşte acum
camera asta, corabia asta blestemată de sub care apele s-au tras
şi a rămas încremenită aici, la etajul trei.
deci plăteşte-i, amice, el e cârmaciul, se clatină mereu
ca-n vechime când vasul sălta peste ape.

iar dacă-njură ascultă-l cucernic: el când înjură
se roagă. aşa cum fac toți aici.
aşa ai să faci şi tu curând.

aici nu stau decât doar cei ca noi.
aici viața se bea şi moartea se uită.

numai în rare clipe de căință şi credință, noaptea,
zidurile se subțiază, se alungesc, se înalță
ca un giulgiu tremurător îmbrăcat de un trup nelumesc.

dar nu se trezeşte nimeni şi dimineața căminul e iar o

his tail at your feet, he'll greet you, hey, amigo, slip me five to ferry you across. the door's always bolted, these guys keep locking me out, they imprison me outside.
don't believe him, pal, you've no idea. the janitor came yesterday and made *him* chief of the landing, he's in charge of this room now — this accursed ship the waters have tossed here, marooned on the third floor.
pay him, my friend, he's the helmsman. he still rocks on his sea-legs
as in the old days when the ship leapt through he waves.

if he swears, listen piously: when he swears
he's really praying. as they all do here.
as you'll soon do.

only those like us live here.
life gets swigged down, death forgotten.

at rare intervals of contrition, of faith, inevitably at night,
the walls grow thin, stretch this way and that, reach higher,
as if a fluttering shroud draped over an unworldly body.

but nobody awakens and in the morning again the building is

cămaşă boţită din buzunarele căreia ieşim numai noi şi atât,
numai noi şi atît.

aici nu stau decât doar cei ca noi.
aici viaţa se bea şi moartea se uită.

7.

patru jnepeni cu bărbi fac înconjurul căminului de nefamilişti.
administratorul aleargă după ei cu foarfecele desfăcute.
noi suntem preoţi, strigă ei, noi n-avem voie să fim tunşi.
noi suntem magi, noi n-avem voie.
avem trei luni de când venim ca să vedem
minunea de la camera treisutecinci —
irod împuţit, noi suntem magi şi am venit s-adeverim
naşterea lui şi să-l cărăm la ţintirim.

8. *pasărea hans*

a venit o pasăre noaptea prin fereastră
şi am fost sigur că e hans.
era pleşuvă ca el şi moartă de beată.
mă, a zis, ia 50 de lei, du-te peste drum, are un

a rumpled shirt out of the pockets of which we alone can leave,
only we.

only those like us live here.
life gets swigged down, death forgotten.

7.

four junipers with beards tour our block of flats.
the janitor chases them away with open scissors.
we're priests, they yell, nobody can cut our hair.
we're magi, you've no right.
for three months we've been travelling to his room
to see the miracle in three-hundred-five —
we're magi, you evil-smelling herod. we've come
to witness his birth and carry him to his tomb.

8. *the hans bird*

a bird flew in through the window at night
i knew for sure it was hans.
it was bald and dead drunk.
hey, he said, here's 50 *lei*, they've got

rachiu grozav. nevermore, i-am răspuns.

zice: de când m-am dus de la voi, zice, m-au
angajat paznic de noapte la belu. am un
girofar a-ntâia. ziua dorm. lucrez cu
poliția. am bani să vă-ngrop. sunt bufnița
minervei. nu deschid ochii decât la lăsarea serii.

acum m-au gradat. am însemne mari pe
ficat. asta de când încă stam p-a-
cilea cu voi. o! şi încă ranele mă dor.
hai, mă, du-te de ia ceva să sărbătorim.

hansi, i-am zis, *nevermore*.



some kick-ass brandy across the road. *nevermore*, i replied.

he says: since i went away from you, they
hired me as night watchman at the cemetery. i have
a first-class flashing light. i sleep by day. i work with
the police. i've money enough to bury you. i've become minerva's
owl. i open my eyes only at nightfall.

they promoted me. i now have large epaulets
on my liver. i had them since the time
here with you. oh! my wounds remain sore.
get going, man, let's have a little something to celebrate.

hansi, i told him, *nevermore*.

[Translated into English by Adam. J. Sorkin and Lidia Vianu]



Mike Ormsby

Democraţie

Vicele bate cu pumnul lui păros în masă şi se stropşeşte poruncitor:

— Linişte, vă rog! Stimatul nostru preşedinte vrea să se adreseze adunării! Locatarii se opresc din conversaţie. Suntem şaisprezece. Stăm pe scaune, înghesuiţi în culoarul îngust de la etajul doi. Soarele face ferestrele să strălucească.

Preşedintele se ridică de la locul lui, îşi potriveşte cravata roşie, se trage de mânecile costumului lui lăbărţat. Are sprâncene negre stufoase, un nas de beţiv şi dinţi galbeni, începe să citească un document. Pe dosul hârtiei se vede un scris plin de înflorituri — discursul lui, probabil.

— Dragi vecini, bun venit la şedinţa de bloc pe 2007. Deoarece acum avem democraţie, veţi avea şi dumneavoastră mai târziu prilejul să luaţi cuvântul. Astăzi vom vota în mai multe chestiuni de importanţă majoră, cum ar fi achiziţionarea unui furtun şi a unor unelte pentru grădină. Ca să nu mai

Democracy

The Vice-President raps his hairy knuckles on the table and barks a command:

'Quiet, please, our esteemed President will address the meeting!' The chatting residents fall silent. There are sixteen of us sitting on chairs in the cramped corridor on the second floor of our block. Sunshine glazes the windows.

The President rises from his seat and adjusts his red tie, tugs the cuffs of his baggy suit. He has black bushy eyebrows, a drinker's nose and yellow teeth. He begins to read from a document. The back of it is covered in florid handwriting — probably his speech.

'Dear neighbours, welcome to the block meeting for 2007. Since we are now a democracy, you will all have a chance to speak later. Today we vote on many key issues, such as buying a hosepipe and tools for the garden. Not to mention next year's committee. So with your permission, I shall begin.

vorbim de alegerea comitetului pe anul viitor. Aşadar, cu permisiunea dumneavoastră, voi începe. Mai întâi, aş vrea să vă spun că anul trecut am avut rezultate foarte, foarte bune.

De lângă mine, vecina mea Lumi îmi aruncă un surâs plictisit şi ochii îi sclipesc, de parc-ar vrea să-mi spună: Rezultate?! E responsabil de bloc, nu director de fabrică! Preşedintele îi dă înainte, uitandu-se din când în când la noi pe deasupra ochelarilor, ca să se asigure că suntem atenţi.

Îmi dau toată osteneala, dar după o vreme mă plictisesc şi mă uit afară pe fereastra crăpată din dreapta mea. În curtea blocului, îndoită de mijloc, Tina, bătrâna femeie de serviciu, strânge gunoaiele. O vede şi Lumi. Schimbăm o privire scurtă. Ce muncă…

Preşedintele anunţă primul articol pus la vot: creşteri de salariu pentru el însuşi, pentru Administratorul Vlaicu şi pentru autoritara lui nevastă. Nu se opune nimeni. Afară de Lumi, care zice:

—Şi pentru Tina?

Vicele îşi ia o expresie preocupată şi face pe loc nişte socoteli cu un creion.

—Păi, am putea să-i mai dăm zece lei, lasă de la el. E tânăr, are o faţă ageră şi vrea, desigur, să facă impresie bună. Dar Administratorul Vlaicu face o mutră constipată.

First, may I say that we had very, very good results last year.'

From the next seat, my neighbour Lumi shoots me a bored grin, eyes sparkling as if to say: Results? He looks after a residential block, he's not the manager of a company! The President rambles on, occasionally glancing at us over his specs, just to make sure we're all paying attention.

I do my best, but after a while I get bored and look through the cracked window to my right. In the yard below, Tina, the old cleaner, is bent double, sweeping rubbish. Lumi is watching her too. We exchange a brief look. What a job.

The President announces the first vote: pay rises for himself, for Administrator Vlaicu and his bossy wife. Nobody objects. Except for Lumi, who asks:

'What about Tina?'

The VP looks concerned and does some quick sums with a pencil.

'I suppose we could give her 10 lei,' he admits. He's young and fresh-faced, no doubt keen to make a good impression. But Vlaicu the Administrator seems about to lay

—Tina nu! se răsteşte deodată, îndreptându-şi spinarea şi aşezându-se mai bine pe marginea scaunului. Vuieşte coridorul. Tina ridică ochii, de parcă l-ar fi auzit. Vlaicu respiră greu.

—Când o ajunge să plătească impozit pe ei, nu se mai alege cu nimic, adaugă. Urmează o clipă de tăcere — vecinii cad pe gânduri. Dar apoi cineva întreabă:

—Păi, atunci dumneavoastră de ce v-aţi dat mărire?

Iarăşi se lasă tăcerea. Vlaicu ne scrutează sumbru, de parcă ar vrea să ne bage la carceră. Dar Preşedintele pare să simtă vântul schimbării politice şi zice, dând din mână:

—Hai, daţi-i şi Tinei 20% ! Mare lucru…

Vlaicu recade în scaun, dându-se bătut.

—Acum haideţi să votăm pentru contoarele de apă, propune Vicele, cu bărbia tremurând.

—De ce? N-avem nevoie de ele! şuieră Vlaicu.

Cu tenul lui deschis, cu ochii albaştri ca de prunc şi ciuful lui şcolăresc, ar putea trece drept un intelectual bonom. O doamnă intr-un trening lăbărţat dă entuziast din cap şi intervine:

—Stimatul nostru Administrator are dreptate! Sunt o

an egg.

'Not Tina!' he snaps, perched on the edge of his seat. His voice booms down the corridor. Tina glances up from the yard, as if she heard it. Vlaicu's chest is heaving.

'By the time she pays tax, it won't be worth her while!' he adds. A brief silence follows, while the residents mull it over. But then someone asks:

'So, why did you get a rise?'

Silent descends once more. Vlaicu glares around the residents like he could put thumbscrews on us all. But the Resident seems to sense the wind of political change and waves a hand, saying:

'Give Tina 20 percent, who cares.'

Vlaicu slumps back in his chair, steaming in defeat.

'Now let's vote on the water meters,' suggests the VP, jowl's a-tremble.

'Why? We don't need to buy them,' hisses Vlaicu.

With his clear skin, baby blue eyes and collegiate mop of silvery hair, he might pass for a genial academic. A lady in a baggy tracksuit nods enthusiastically and chips in:

'Our esteemed Administrator is correct! They're a trick

şmecherie inventată de ăştia din Vest, care ne iau de fraieri. Mă fulgeră din priviri — ideea e că ştiu eu prea bine cine sunt ăştia. Ridic mâna. Preşedintele o vede, prezenţa mea pare să-l amuze şi mă încurajează să iau cuvântul:

—Ia s-auzim, englezule !

—Contoarele nu sunt o înşelătorie, zic. Cu ajutorul lor, fiecare din noi va plăti exact cât a consumat şi se evită erorile.

Înainte să apuce careva să răspundă, un ţăcănit de tocuri pe scări ne anunţă o participantă întârziată. O femeie firavă într-un pardesiu maro pufos îşi strecoară bărbia pe după uşă, ca o pisică îngrijorată c-ar putea da peste un câine. Îl vede pe Vlaicu, care tocmai îşi dă ochii peste cap, adică asta mai lipsea. Şi spune cu o voce hotărâtă:

—Măi, oameni buni, dacă aveţi de gând să alegeţi vreun preşedinte, măcar puneţi unul pe care să te poţi bizui. Nu unul care nu-i niciodată aici şi pe care trebuie să-l pândeşti o săptămână ca să-l prinzi. Atâta am avut de spus.

Capul dispare instantaneu, ca o marionetă smucită de sfoară.

—Mulţumesc, doamna Dumitrescu, oftează Vlaicu.

Credinciosul lui locotenent în costum lăbărţat se ridică şi se îndreaptă legănandu-se spre uşa deschisă, iar ea ţipă de pe scări:

invented by someone in the West, who thinks we're stupid.' She flashes me a dark look, as if I might know who. I raise my hand. The President spots it and seems to be amused by my presence, but he encourages me to speak.

'Let's hear it, English.'

'Meters are not a scam,' I suggest. 'They will help everyone to pay their due, and they can prevent errors.'

Before anyone can respond, clicking heels on the stairs signal a late arrival. A frail woman in a spongy brown coat pokes her chin round the open doorway, like a cat checking for dogs. She spots Vlaicu, who rolls his eyes as if to say oh no. She speaks in a firm voice:

'If you lot are electing presidents, please elect one who's reliable. Not someone who's never around and you have to wait a week to find him. That's all.'

Then her head vanishes, like a puppet's yanked from behind by hands unseen.

'Thank you, Mrs Dumitrescu,' sighs Vlaicu. His loyal lieutenant in the baggy tracksuit stands up and waddles to the open door, then she screams down the landing:

—Să te ia dracu'! De fiecare dată când îți speli balconul apa ta murdară curge la mine!

Preşedintele ne cheamă la ordine şi ne explică funcționarea apometrelor. Se declară favorabil instalării lor, cu toate că sunt o invenție capitalistă. Arată că sunt bine gândite şi sigure, nu li se pot manipula şuruburile fiindcă au tot felul de sugilii la puliuțe. Toată lumea se hăhăie, în frunte cu boşorogii de o sută de ani, care se cutremură şi se înroşesc de râs în costumele lor de înmormântare. Următorul vot e pentru achiziționarea unui bec la lift. Unii locatari arată că sunt de acord să stea în întuneric dacă aşa se face economie. Dar Preşedintele îi convinge, explicandu-le că trăim intr-o democrație modernă, plus că el, care locuieşte la etajul întâi, trebuie să folosească liftul de mai multe ori pe zi.

—Şi, afară de asta, turcul de la ultimul etaj s-a oferit să doneze un bec din magazinul lui. Pe urmă discutăm despre mirosurile din baie.

—A mea pute, se plânge Lumi. M-am gândit chiar să-mi vând apartamentul.

Vlaicu ridică ochii la ea, cu o sclipire în albastrul lor infantil.

—Şi ce te împiedică? o întreabă sarcastic. Un domn între

'Go to hell! Every time you wash your balcony, dirty water drips onto mine!'

The President calls for order and explains how water meters work. He admits he's in favour of the idea, even if it is a capitalist one. He mentions how the meters are well-made and cannot be tampered with, because they all have cocks and nipples. Everyone laughs, especially the old guys aged ninety-ten, who sit shuddering red-faced in their black funeral suits. The next vote is about whether or not to buy a new light bulb for the elevator. Some residents say they don't mind standing in the dark if it saves money. But the President over rules them, explaining that we live in a modern democracy, plus he lives on the first floor and must use the lift several times a day.

'Besides,' he adds, 'The Turk on the top floor offered to donate a lamp from his shop.' Then we discuss smelly bathrooms.

'Mine stinks,' complains Lumi, 'I even considered selling my flat.'

Vlaicu looks up, baby blue eyes twinkling.

'So why don't you?' he asks, sarcastically. A middle-aged man in a wide tie tells Vlaicu not to be rude. Lumi replies

două vârste, cu o cravată lată, îi cere lui Vlaicu să nu fie mojic. Lumi spune că vrea să rezolve problema, nu să se mute.

—Vreau să ştiu de ce miroase instalaţia în halul ăsta, continuă ea. Şi, ştiţi cu toţii, nu e prima oară că întreb.

Preşedintele se preface că e ocupat cu aranjatul hârtiilor. Vicele îi şopteşte ceva lui Vlaicu, care aprobă din cap şi răspunde:

—Din cauza chinezilor, care şi-au renovat apartamentul.

Câţiva întorc capul, parcă ar vrea să vadă dacă locatarii chinezi sunt prezenţi. Nu sunt. Soţia autoritară a lui Vlaicu face cu degetul şi murmură sumbru:

— Au tot felul de şmecherii în bucătărie.

Apoi cineva întreabă de ce se înfundă ghena în fiecare săptămână.

—Din cauza lui Dumitrescu ăla de la trei, bombăne Vlaicu şi bate cu degetul în caietul Vicelui, ca pentru a-i cere să ia notă. Nu obiectează nimeni şi domnul Dumitrescu nu e de faţă să protesteze. Vicele mâzgăleşte verdictul cu pixul încleştat între degetele lui grăsulii. E aer închis şi unii cască deja, deşi e doar 11 dimineaţa. Iar Vlaicu face un anunţ-surpriză: s-ar putea să-şi dea demisia din Comitet.

—Deşi îmi fac datoria cu pasiune, am probleme de sănătate. Trebuie să iau medicamente scumpe din străinătate şi

that she just wants to fix the problem, not move out.

'I simply want to find out why the plumbing smells so bad,' she continues. 'And, as you all know, this is not the first time I've asked.'

The President busies himself shuffling papers. The VP murmurs to Vlaicu, who nods and replies:

'It's because the Chinese renovated their apartment.'

A few heads turn, as if checking whether our Chinese residents are present. They are not. Vlaicu's bossy wife waves a finger and mutters darkly: 'They have gadgets in their kitchen.'

Next, someone asks why the rubbish chute gets blocked every week.

'Because of that Dumitrescu on the third floor,' grunts Vlaicu, tapping the VP's notepad, as if he wants it written down. Nobody objects and Mr. Dumitrescu isn't here to protest. The VP scribbles the verdict, pen clutched in his podgy fist. By now, the air is stale and mouths are yawning, even though it's only 11 am. Then Vlaicu makes a surprise announcement: he may resign from the Committee.

'Even though I am passionate about my job, I'm ill. I've costly pills imported from abroad and need time to go to

am nevoie de timp să mă duc în stațiuni, la tratament. Dar nu vreau să se spună că mă sustrag…

Femeia în trening lăbărțat afişează o expresie consternată, îşi trece degetele uscățive prin părul vopsit cu henna şi îl roagă să rămână. Alți locatari par mai puțin afectați. Vlaicu ridică din umeri şi spune: Vă mulțumesc pentru sprijin, o să mă mai gândesc. Apoi un tip în vârstă, cu o şapcă de sport, se plânge că e păr de câine peste tot. Vlaicu strigă mânios:

— De acord! De la câinele ăla mare! Care stă cu neamțul, da?

O doamnă zâmbitoare, cu dinți de aur, intervine:

—Vai, dar ce frumos e!

Preşedintele anunță apoi noii candidați pentru Comitetul de anul viitor şi citeşte numele celor cinci care sunt şi acum în Comitet. Un domn paşnic, într-un pulover spălăcit, dă din cap:

—Avem nevoie de forțe proaspete. O propun pe Lumi.

Mulți sunt de acord. Dar Vlaicu are o obiecție:

—Lumi are de gând să-şi vândă apartamentul şi n-o să mai fie aici, din cauza chinezilor. Lumi ridică din umeri indiferentă.

Votul final are loc în grabă. Câțiva locatari se plâng că nu înțeleg.

resorts. But I don't want people saying I'm skiving...'

The woman in the baggy tracksuit looks aghast, running bony fingers through her hennaed hair and urging him to stay on. Other residents look somewhat less concerned; Vlaicu shrugs and says: 'Thank you all for your support, I'll think about it.' Then an old guy in a baseball hat complains about dog hair. Vlaicu yells 'I agree! From that huge dog! It lives with the German guy, yes?'

A smiley lady with gold teeth intervenes:

'But what a beauty!'

The President then announces new candidates for next year's Committee and reads out the five names of those currently serving. A quiet man in a faded sweater shakes his head:

'We need new blood. I propose Lumi.'

Others agree. But Vlaicu objects, saying:

'Lumi plans to sell her Hat and probably won't be around, because of the Chinese.' Lumi shrugs, indifferent.

There's a final hurried vote. Some residents complain they don't understand.

—Votați, pur şi simplu votați! îi zoreşte Preşedintele, cu ochii pe ceas. Apoi bărbatul paşnic, în pulover, întreabă:

—Şi cu graffiti-ul ăla din lift cum rămâne?

Se lasă liniştea. Câteva capete se întorc spre el, oamenii îşi zâmbesc sau se încruntă unul la altul.

—Dar ce scrie acolo? întreabă Vlaicu.

—Muie Vlaicu, spune bărbatul vârstnic în pulover.

Administratorul Vlaicu nici nu clipeşte. Preşedintele dă din mână şi spune:

—Ce contează? Asta e democrația!



'Just vote, vote!' urges the President, checking his watch. Then the quiet man in the sweater asks:

'And what about that graffiti, scratched in the elevator?'

Silence falls. Heads turn, smiles and frowns are exchanged.

'Why, what does it say?' asks Vlaicu.

'*Suck me, Vlaicu*' says the old guy in the sweater.

Administrator Vlaicu doesn't flinch. The President waves a hand and says:

'Who cares? That's democracy.'

[Translated into English by the author]



Grete Tartler

Lutierul

Cu ochelari de sârmă, chelie strălucitoare,
într-o încăpere plină de canari:
era lutierul cel mai cunoscut, lui
părinții mei i-au cerut
să-mi construiască vioara.
Îmi amintesc: eram elevă, urcam
scara îngustă de porumbar
pe lângă un coş tras pe sfoară, bun
să ia poşta şi ziarele.
Apoi, studentă fiind, vioara tot n-o aveam.
Mai era un amănunt, ceva de finisat.
Azi fiica mea are nevoie de ea,
dar lutierul se încruntă:
n-o să mă las grăbit
doar pentru că unii au din tată-n fiu
obsesia că trebuie să cânte.

The Violin-Maker

With his wire spectacles and shiny bald head
in a room full of canaries,
he was the most famous instrument-maker,
and my parents asked him
to make me a violin.
I remember: I was a schoolgirl; I climbed
the narrow dovecot staircase
next to a basket on a rope, intended
for hauling up mail or newspapers.
Then I became a student, and still no violin —
there was still some detail, something to finish.
Today my daughter needs it,
but the violin-maker frowns:
'I won't be hurried
just because some people happen to inherit
an obsession with playing an instrument.'

[Translated into English by Fleur Adcock]

Stelian Tănase

Zgaiba



Zgaiba died Wednesday at 17:26 — his head smashed in. A car travelling at speed killed him in the middle of the street. The sound of the blow kept ringing in Vivi's brain. The driver never stopped. He must have heard a thud under the body of the car, there under the right front wheel. He floored the accelerator, and remoteness swallowed him. Vivi lost track of the car at the end of the street. *Tsak tsak tsak*: He went on shooting the images reflexively. That was the thing. Horrified. Zgaiba. Images on the sidewalk. The dog didn't drop right away. He was hurled a metre along the curb. He didn't bark. He didn't yelp. He didn't let out a sound. Time stood still. It took Vivi a moment to come back to his senses. Zgaiba: images on the pavement — his eyes fogged over; his big eyes, stunned. In a state of shock. His tail lowered, his ears pricked. Vivi went on looking at the dog's coffee-colored spine there among the iron spears of the fence. *Tsak, tsak, tsak*. Zgaiba had started heading back to the gate that had let him out earlier. He had crossed the street. He had nearly slipped into the courtyard. He gazed into the familiar place without understanding what hit him. From dying to collapse, the whole scene lasted an instant. Right before Vivi's eyes.

Vivi had been taking a cigarette break. Between smokes, he went on snapping pictures of Zgaiba, who he'd spotted down in the street. His favorite character. He had hundreds of clichéd snaps of the dog. Vivi himself was up in the attic at the time. He was looking at the cold weather, the cornices across the street. He'd been developing yesterday's pix for an hour. Failures, without



éclat, flops, dumb mistakes: he had spoiled ten rolls of film. Irritated, tired, Vivi had picked up the camera and started taking pictures of Zgaiba bumming around the area — it relaxed him, *tsak, tsak, tsak* — when the car had appeared. A shiny black body. With headlights on. Evening hadn't fallen yet. There was a dirty ashen light. Overcast sky. It'll snow, Vivi had told himself earlier, with his elbows on the sill. The blow to the brain flashed into being—unforeseeably—after that.

Vivi hurried down the stairs, skipping three steps at a time. Some voice on the landing set up a protest — he was making racket. He ripped open the entrance door. He made it into the courtyard and screeched to a halt. Zgaiba was lying prostrate on the roadway. Afraid to get closer, Vivi stopped a few steps away. As if inside an imaginary circle, he contemplated the dog for an instant. Bloody muzzle. Legs rigid. Thick fur. Unable to haul the truth in, without understanding, Vivi brought the camera to his eyes, pushed the button, *tsak*. Once, twice, without stopping. All stretched out like that, lifeless, Zgaiba was terribly beautiful. His black head, his sharp ears, powerfully pointed, his proud tail. The image of a pagan god, old and mysterious. Stiff as a board, emptied of life in an instant.

What should he do? Vivi hadn't the faintest. Should he call a doctor? There was one among the neighbours. He managed to touch Zgaiba. No pulse. Nothing. The throat, the chest. Nowhere. 'Stop kidding. Say something!' Vivi stroked the dog, played with his paws, brushed his muzzle, looked in his eyes. 'Come on, Zgaiba, old man. Aren't you happy? It's me, Vivi!!...'

'He's dead!' a voice fell down from somewhere above. At her window, the neighbour leaned over her sill. For Vivi she counted as a rasping voice, a head that had popped out from a broken window. 'He's dead.' 'No!' 'Don't weep for him. He's in heaven. It's better there. If it weren't, someone would have come back with all the whys and wherefores…' 'No!' 'Be glad he's escaped this vale of tears…' Another window opened. A head with messed up hair, a greenish dye job,



pyjama top. Old, half-naked chest. 'How did it happen?' Vivi couldn't muster a word. The others had plenty to say, like, 'Throw him in the garbage. There's a bin at the vacant lot toward the tram.' 'To let the worms eat him?' 'He'll stick. He'll swell up and smell.' But now the mate of the head from a moment ago was popping up. The guy had called his wife from inside to see what was going. 'Call the Board of Health…' 'The garbage men!...' 'Who's going to get rid of this cadaver for us?' 'There's an undertaker at the square. I'll let them know we have a dead body in the courtyard….' Suspended from a balcony above, a flag began to shake over the wrought iron parapet. 'And the police force, what's it doing?' 'Nothing. What's there to do?' 'It's a dog, not a person,' the old lady chimed in in a nettlesome way, her sepulchral voice, low and very deep. 'It's a good thing he died. We've gotten rid of his mess. You step in shit all over the sidewalk…' 'Hey man, what're ya doin' with that flag?' 'I like waving it whenever I get a chance.' 'Another madman…' Vivi takes a gander at a broad, flat head, a mask of something like whitewash on its face, the shoulders in a green dressing gown. 'I was afraid to come home, for fear he'd attack me…' 'Did he ever attack you, huh?' 'That's all I needed!' 'What breed?' The rasping voice can't say enough: 'Hehe, he was a local mutt, what pedigree? He's a certified Vacant Lot. Bravo!' 'What's with you, still with lords and aristocrats?' 'I made mince meat of the lot of you in prison once… I was hunting you like rabid dogs — with a baseball bat over the head.' 'You have blood on your hands.' 'Yeah, and I'm proud of it, God forgive me…' 'What has God got to do with it?' 'When the brigade used to step out on parade with the flag, the whole town admired us. You have no idea…'

Vivi disappeared, entered the stairwell, lit a bulb. He lived in an apartment on the second floor in the old, Cotroceni district. The bloc was built between the wars, and he had a corner of the attic where he'd installed his lab. But now, Vivi was slamming the door against the wall in a rush on his way in. He ran up the stairs, panting. Zgaiba didn't bound into the hall to welcome him. He



didn't yap happily. No one scolded Vivi for being late, for not having left him food and water, for not having taken him out for a walk, for leaving him alone. The cheerful bark, the leap into his arms — *nada*. Deserted rooms. Vivi looked around the apartment. Zgaiba didn't frisk in from his basket, or the terrace or anywhere. Vivi grabbed the shovel from the storage closet, the coverlet from the sofa. He felt guilty. Zgaiba had escaped into the street through the gate he himself had left open.

He had come home loaded with baggage. He was carrying some photographic apparatus, a tripod. He was getting ready for a photo shoot somewhere off at the back of hell and gone. He would have to be at the North Station tomorrow at dawn. There wouldn't be time to stop at the editorial office, so he'd brought everything home. He had his hands full, and he'd knocked the door shut with his knee. Near him, Zgaiba had bounded about happily, but Vivi had needed to put everything down. As it was, he barely made it up the stairs. It was a narrow, unaccommodating flight. With baggage, it was a problem dragging up to the first floor. After depositing his things, he'd stayed in the lab to develop some films. The urgent ones. Then, Vivi went on looking at Zgaiba.

Now he didn't know how to mourn for him. Having made it back into the courtyard, Vivi sat with his arse on the entrance step, Zgaiba stretched out beside him. He ran his fingers through Zgaiba's fur. He took him by the legs, pulled him onto the coverlet. He wrapped him up like a child. He took him in his arms, slung him over his shoulder. The courtyard wasn't empty anymore. Posted on the landing, the tenants were waiting to see what he would do. They watched him in silence. Carrying the dog, he passed right by them. They stood back to give him room. Vivi chose a place at the back of the courtyard. Under a lilac. Near a bush. Summers, Zgaiba like to doze there in the shade. To sleep when the sun beat down too hard. Vivi had photographed him here sometimes — stretched out, lost to this world — between the garage of the neighbour to the south and the garden wall.



Carefully, Vivi set the coverlet down beside him. He hesitated about where to start digging. Head toward the East. Vivi pawed the earth with the tip of the shovel, slowly. He tossed some stones aside. He dug with his head sunk between his shoulders — talking to himself, humming a song, measuring out the movements of the shovel.

But he can't get away from the neighbours. The chorus begins: 'Leave it, neighbour, don't be sad. The Russians were cutting us to ribbons, like this, see. They were mowing us down, and we were frozen stiff.' Another chimes in: 'Listen, neighbour, I sing at the church, among other things — from the lectern. Let's make him a mass. I know the hymn…' 'That's what he needs!' says another. 'We're talking about a wild beast, we'd do better to flay him…' 'You were always dogs…' By now it's turning into the tower of Babel. 'Be good,' someone says, 'don't wander around the house at night. I hear you. You scrabble around on the ceiling and wake me up. Better you should pay the maintenance. You're late. They'll cut off our gas… We'll die of cold.' 'I didn't know you were still alive,' comes the reply.' 'Congrats! I was thinking that the apartment downstairs was empty, up for sale. Didn't you die last winter?' 'No. Don't you see me? Are you blind or something?' 'Kind of around February?' 'NOT!' 'A buyer came yesterday to find out about the price.' 'I'm not selling. Better I should die.' 'They'll find you by the smell, rotting in the house. You'll rot…' 'Sonofabitch.' 'You have no one to give you a glass of water. Go to the old folks home.' 'Me?' 'Yeah, you!' '…With our eyes on the flag,' the standard bearer remarks: 'The head of the work brigade was leading the column. We, in overalls under the official tribune, saluting. We were so proud!' 'You gotta dig deep. I buried hundreds of our guys at Stalingrad. Just a couple of shovels doesn't cut it...'

Vivi stops for an instant. He looks at the neighbours, a quartet. Frozen under one of the eaves of the building. When did it begin to snow? One of them opened a big black umbrella like a horse



blanket, like a canvas sail. The old man from the first floor, leaning on his flag. The old lady, dyed blond, with a something like a mask of flour on her face, in a green dressing gown with hair curlers under her kerchief. This lady's husband listens to the gentleman from the half-basement. 'Let me introduce myself. The name's Popescu.'

Vivi turned his back to them. He went on digging. He needed a deeper grave. A deeper grave. A deeper grave. He kept digging with the gnashing sound of the shovel in his ears.

'Who put him…?' 'If he'd stayed in the courtyard he'd have lived…' says the old lady, struggling to close the front of her dressing gown. A shiny green dressing gown with big pink chrysanthemums. 'Hehe, he chose freedom, and what did it get him? He died before his time! Good behaviour — that's why obedience pays in the end. You shouldn't revolt. You shouldn't venture.' 'Better an injection than on a chain. You ever hear of euthanasia?' The gentleman with the flag raised it over the others' heads, as if it were something on a spear. 'It's a relief. Me, I'm happy waiting to die.' 'Bite your tongue.' 'The same thing's waiting for you too, ya know. Or your relatives will kill you out of pity, to get hold of your place. One little prick and it's torment bye-bye. You wind up in a place full of light, in a green place, in a place of rest from which all pain has flown — all pain and sadness and sighs.' 'What's come over you, Mr. Popescu, to frighten me this way?' 'But dog catchers, what do you have to say about them?' 'They were on the street yesterday, collaring stray dogs…' 'That's how it was at Stalingrad, you know. We were pickin' up the dead, froze stiff, with ammunition carts.' 'You're one of them, pal' 'What? A corpse?' 'A stray dog.' 'Let's find a woman for him.' 'A home body…' 'Ha, when we were marching in parade, the whole herd followed me… I've kept the flag since then. Those were the days, not these! Volunteers! We were dedicating our youth to the fatherland!' 'A sad case of masturbation, that's what it is. Tell me you never jerked off at least once.' 'That's a load of crap, to put it simply…' Goose-stepping on the spot, the gentleman



with the flag took up the tune of an old march. He had caps on his boots, and in that courtyard they made a powerful sound. His determined chin jutted out from under his beret… his toothless mouth, his watery eyes.

‘There's no difference between a man's bone and a dog's.’ ‘Only our spirit remains after we're gone…’ ‘Whaaaat remains?’ ‘Are you deaf?’ ‘Yeah, a bit I am!’ ‘Leave it, man, no one has ever come back from there to tell us a thing.’ ‘Lazarus… only he, touched by Jesus.’ ‘Opium for the people. I'll give you one with the flag that'll hunch your back. Aren't you ashamed to be up to such tricks??? You're lying….’ ‘Who knows what kind of whore chaser you were, you little fuck.’ ‘You think I don't know that you poisoned the dog last month. You're happy now that he's dead.’ ‘At least it won't smell of dog piss on the stairs anymore.’ ‘Keeping animals in the building is forbidden. That's how we voted. It's a heresy. Mista' Vivi doesn't respect the rules.’ ‘What an evil head he had, like a blood-thirsty wild beast, like a devil.’ ‘Who, Mista Vivi?’ ‘No, the dog!... the eyes he had… and those pointy teeth! Did you see those pointy teeth?’ ‘Where do you see the devil? He was a sweetheart. He'd leap up to lick your face if you paid him the least attention.’ ‘A pure soul. May the soil rest lightly on is grave…’ ‘The people in this building are like out of whore house.’ ‘Who'll bark for me now when I go for the paper?’ ‘I should like to say a few words, in remembrance, now that death has settled in this beautiful dwelling bringing sadness.’

Vivi jumped into the grave, found it suitable, wiped the dirt off his hands, reached over to a low tap, washed his hands. Cold water, sharp as a knife. Then, he got hold of the coverlet, tried to pull it. No success, so he took Zgaiba in his arms. Zgaiba: wrapped in the coverlet like a child. The dog was heavy. Softly, carefully, Vivi deposited Zgaiba at the bottom of the grave. He stood there waiting for a minute, staring, broke up a lump of sand. He took up the shovel, temporarily forgotten and thrust into the ground a meter away. He cut carefully into the heap of earth and threw it into



the hole. He rested his chin on the handle of the shovel. He stared at the grave. Zgaiba was covered in rime. They weren't parted yet. They still had an instant. 'But perhaps the dearly beloved gathered here would like to hear a few heart-felt words.'

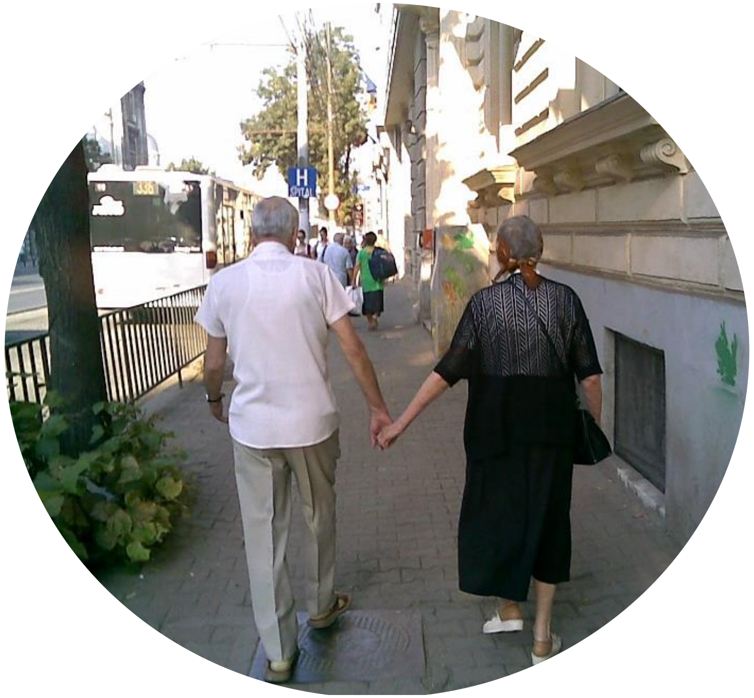
'You're not at church, mate. That's where you deliver sermons, speeches.' 'Let's hear it for the Party!' 'Fuck the Party!' 'Still,' Mr. Popescu took a step forward, 'what a parting it is, oh my brothers! What lamentation, what mourning there is here now! Thus, come now to kiss the one who was with us a moment ago. For he goes down into the grave, covered with earth, to dwell in the house of darkness, to be buried with the dead. Now as we are parting, all his relatives and friends pray God to give him rest.' 'Which one of you farted, mate? Hey, neighbour, you really broke wind... May it do you good...' Saying that, the speaker got down to smell the other guy's arse. 'You're eating too many beans. That'll make you foolish…' 'The guy with the fart gives him a dig with his elbow.' 'Shh, let's listen!' 'Now all the great deceptions and vanities of this life are undone, for the soul has left its place, the vessel is broken, the clay has blackened into the earth, voiceless, without feeling, dead, unmoving, for the one we accompany to the grave we pray God to give him peace without end.' 'Let me help you!' 'Do you know how to sing?' 'We were doing it on the front. The Russians were pressing us from behind with bayonets — without shoes in the frost. Siberia. We, prisoners in rags.' 'You're lying, you old crook. What are you rattling on about over there? Which Siberia… I know you. You weren't on any front. You kept a hotel full of hookers in Brăila…' The speaker moved the huge black ragged umbrella aside. The snow fell down on the four of them, buried them, froze them, hid them from view. Vivi could barely make them out behind the curtain of snow. He only heard — tremolo — the pathetic voice of Mr. Popescu, the church singer. He guessed that Mr. Popescu sometimes left him some funeral sweet on the door mat or some twisted funeral breads hanging from the handle of his door. 'What is our life?'

'In truth, flower, and mist, and morning dew. Come witness how all is made plain in the tombs: where is the beauty of the body? Where is youth? Where are the eyes and the body's face? Everything has faded like grass, all have perished. Come. Thus let us fall before Christ with tears...' 'Hey you old duffer, you're getting all bent over under the snow. Do you want to die too?' The old woman began fastening the old guy's buttons. Her husband remained submissive, silent. The former brigade leader advanced goose stepping through the garden. He spread the flag with its royal insignia over Zgaiba. He turned about face, faced front, clicked his heels. He saluted, rigid, his hand at his beret. Through pursed lips, he brought out some vague trumpet sounds. Those who had stayed under the eaves advanced a few paces. Vivi, outside the grave — bowing his head but still forced to look at them — went on throwing earth over Zgaiba. 'Let's leave them alone,' said the veteran of Stalingrad. The quartet made its way back, disappeared through the door, fadingly, amidst the snow.

Vivi trampled down the earth. He grabbed some flowers from the house and hurried back down the stairs. He scattered chrysanthemums over the earth of the tomb, under which Zgaiba's body lay. Somehow, he divined the tenants' faces flattened against the glass, their stares thrust into the back of his neck, his shoulder blades. He stayed like that for minutes on end so that it would snow on him — until he too whitened in his turn. Later, he sat with his arse on the entrance step, never taking his eyes from the grave. Vivi was frozen when he began to cry. He cried like a child. In that dark. In that snowfall. In that cold that comes before Christmas.

[Rewritten in English by Jean Harris]

Ioana Ieronim



Madonna and Elvis

Silver birds above the city
cricket calls flooding the air

Madonna and Elvis, the homeless teenagers
their skin luminous under tatters
their eyes shimmering in the translucent
mid-summer darkness of Bucharest

just the two of them, hovering between
a parked Chrysler
and the statue of a Founding Father
with his court of reclining nymphs

the night's whispers

won't surrender to words

what might have been
falls behind
shredded under the late
unhurried swish of wheels
driving home

[Written in English]



Dan Dănilă

Ella at Free Europe



At midnight, breathless, between two songs,
hearing the pink noises with the premonition
of her voice, a split second before the others

My ears full of love, the tape recorder
a hot raptor with slow digestion
and never satisfied — the songs never ending,
like her life, a melody consumed just for my own sake

Yet she doesn't know I'm exiled here in the dark, near
her records, her picture on the loudspeaker,
next to her favourite colour. Take five,
this could be our last date. Maybe
one day I will run off, along a record's
narrow groove, between two evergreens,

(evasion is a real thing — i.e., the dark side of the moon, through the looking glass, and Sing-Sing, Alcatraz ...)

At midnight, breathless, between two songs...

[Written in English]



Mike Ormsby

Mother Tongue



'Do you like comics?' says Răzvan, rummaging in a kitchen cupboard. He's nine years old and has a large collection.

'Everyone likes comics,' I say.

'Not in our house,' says little Tudor, Răzvan's younger brother, leaning in the doorway, watching with big brown eyes. He wears flip-flops and Mickey Mouse shorts. Sunset illuminates the kitchen like a sepia postcard. It smells of fried onions.

We're tired after a long day exploring the delights of Cluj-Napoca: the National Museum of Art with its Romanian masters, the Ethnographic Museum with its bee-pots and animal traps; the botanical gardens with its Japanese bridge, exquisite orchids and palm trees. It's nice to relax with kids. We're not related, just buddies.

Răzvan hauls a stack of dog-eared comics to the table where I'm sitting.

'Perhaps you could read for me?' I say, 'Your Dad tells me you're good?'

Răzvan shrugs and ruffles his curly black hair as I peruse the bright graphics and bold titles: Spiderman; Top Secret; Time Warriors.

'OK,' he says, both elbows on the table, 'But which one?'

'Yeah, which one?' says little Tudor. I consider my options, and point.

'Scooby Doo in Ancient Egypt?' says Răzvan, 'Excellent choice.'



'Excellent choice,' says Tudor, settling beside me on the wooden bench.

Răzvan reads well, flipping the coloured pages. I can hardly keep up. His Romanian is clear and melodic, music to my ears. But he stops when his mother appears, wearing a pinafore. Little Tudor groans. Maria surveys us, hands on hips.

'Comics?' she says, with an air of disapproval.

Tudor leans into me, and whispers: 'I told you.'

Maria barks orders at the three of us: 'Time for dinner. Wash hands, move to the terrace. Quickly now.'

She turns but her husband Gabriel is blocking the doorway. He has on a tight T-shirt, biceps like a bodybuilder. He smiles and says: 'What's the problem?'

'No problem,' says Maria, brushing past him.

Gabriel winks at his sons. 'The law is the law,' he says, 'And I should know.'

We move outside and take our seats for dinner. We fill our plates with baked fish, roast peppers, barbecued chicken, tiny sausages, smoked aubergines and new potatoes. There are seven of us — Gabriel and Maria, plus her aging parents, the two boys and me. Plus a Persian cat that lurks below the table with a squashed-up face like it ran into a wall. I can never remember its name. Beethoven?

The wine flows and Gabi tells his sons about how he and I first met, in a Bucharest bar, watching footy. I'm sipping and concurring — those were the days, drinking beer and talking baloney, just before he hooked up with Maria, the glamorous post-grad with a sharp tongue and a twinkle in her eye.

Her hair is flecked with grey now and she seems less interested in our past than in Romania's future. She steers the conversation towards politics. Inevitably, her sons soon look bored. Tudor dangles a slither of meat above his face, eating it from the bottom up. When the chat subsides, I tell them a joke about a duck. Răzvan laughs and says: 'Magnifico!'



'Magnifico!' says Tudor, chewing with his eyes closed.

'I know a joke too,' says Răzvan, 'Three men are building a house. But they can't use the toilet until they finish. So, the first man — ' Răzvan breaks off mid-sentence and looks worried. Maria is observing him, her eyes wide and head cocked.

'Răzvan,' she says, 'That's not a good joke.'

He looks deflated. 'Mum, how do you know, if I haven't even finished it?'

'You've finished it,' says Maria. Răzvan looks to his Dad who pours himself a glass of wine and concludes an anecdote he started earlier, about trying to prosecute some wise guy over a dodgy shipping contract. He sounds frustrated and hints how the judge took a bribe. His father-in-law is sitting alongside in a cardigan and bi-focal specs, listening closely or not at all. Gravy glistens on his silver moustache.

Maria smiles at Răzvan but he does not smile back. She diverts her gaze first to her rotund mother, whose kindly sigh seems well practised, and then to me.

'Răzvan is very intelligent,' Maria says, 'Top of every class. Silly jokes are beneath him. We hope he'll be a lawyer, like his father.'

'Bad idea,' says Gabriel, refilling our wine glasses.

Răzvan blushes hard until his face matches the tomatoes on his plate. I feel a twinge of guilt, and say: 'It was just a joke, Maria, probably my fault for …'

She lays down her fork and gives me a puzzled look. The case is closed. The other adults munch in silence, staring into their plates as if fascinated by the food.

'I know a joke too,' says little Tudor, 'And there won't be any problems with mine, like there was with his.' He jabs a greasy thumb towards his elder brother.

Maria rolls her eyes. 'Very well, if you insist. But keep it short, and polite.'

Răzvan turns to me and says: 'He's seven by the way. Just so you know.'



'Seven and a half,' says Tudor, flashing a perfect smile. He breathes deeply, inflating his puny chest. He scratches his ear and chuckles, probably rehearsing the lines in his head. We watch and wait. Răzvan drums the table with his fingers. 'So?'

'So what?', says Tudor.

'So tell your joke.'

'Three men are building a house, but they can't use the toilet, and…'

'Tudor,', says Maria.

'What?'

'It's the same joke.'

Tudor blinks. 'Oh, is it?' he says, and sits down again, fingering his food.

'Knife and fork, monkey,' says Răzvan.

'Good idea,' says Tudor, reaching for his cutlery. It's still wrapped in a linen napkin. Răzvan puts his head in his hands and groans. Tudor saws off a chunk of meat, skewers it on his fork and glances up at me. 'Was my joke funny?'

I wink and he winks back, like he's got grit in his eye. He glances warily towards Maria then leans into me and says in a low voice: 'Do you like comics?'

***

I leave Romania to work in Africa for a bit. Gabriel stays in touch by email and over the months I detect a gradual change in his mood. He's frustrated with practising law: Because I never fight a case, all I do is ask for it to be adjourned, then I pass money in an envelope. When I ask if he means more bribes, he writes back: Wake up, my friend, this is Romania.

He tells me that it's impossible to know how the cash finally reaches the judges, but he assures

me it does, by a circuitous route: There's no trial by jury here, our legal system is still corrupt, all these years after the Revolution. Why?



I also notice a darker tone to his comments about family life. It starts as a laddish joke — he refers to his wife Maria as Central Committee. But soon he has a new name for her: The War Office. I don't pry and he doesn't reveal.

In his next email, three months later, Gabriel says he wants to emigrate and he has been checking his options:

Canada? New Zealand? What do you think, my friend, somewhere I could practise my profession with dignity and provide a decent life for my family? My sons are keen. There's only one problem: the War Office is against the idea. She likes her job lecturing at the university. Her parents live up our street. She's built her nest. But I've had enough. I need to get out. This country is like some beautiful woman whom you cannot trust. Perhaps I should come to Rwanda, what's it like, my friend?

I sit at my desk in Kigali wondering how to reply. Either Gabriel has discovered Romantic poetry or he's on crack. I listen to the avocadoes dropping from trees outside my study. They hit the grass with a reassuring thump, heavy and ripe. I can hear the gardener whistling as he scoops them into his basket. I get up and stand by the window, to see how many he has collected. Didier is bent double, hard at work. He survived the genocide of 1994 but has a nasty scar on his arm from a *machete*.

I go back to my desk and write to Gabriel, wishing him luck and urging him not to lose perspective. But it sounds glib and I hope I won't lose his confidence.

Sure enough, I hear nothing for a year. I'm squatting on a battered wooden stool in some dingy Internet café out in the sticks, when Gabriel's next email lands out of the blue like a wire-guided bomb:

Guess what, my friend! I won the visa lottery for the USA! My boys will come too! PS. I'm getting a divorce.

When the room has stopped spinning, I try to type another diplomatic reply, but all I can think about is Maria.

***

One sunny afternoon, I find myself back in Romania, sitting in her study in Cluj. Her shelves bulge with books and box-files, but the house feels empty, almost dead, until she boots up her PC and American accents boom from the audio speakers.



We're on Skype. Maria's two sons gaze out at us from the screen, pink and blurry. The image is delayed and it melts in swathes of coloured light as they move. Răzvan and Tudor are teenagers now, flicking their long hair and leaving long pauses before answering my questions, as if trying to locate my name and face from ancient history. Tudor is chewing the corners of his fringe. After a while, Răzvan says:

'So, you're that guy who visited with us when we still lived with Mom, right?'

I nod at the screen. 'I'm that guy. We read some comics, remember?'

'Nope.'

'How's life in New York?'

'The subway sucks,' says Răzvan. He resembles his father, even as a digital ghost. I edge closer for a better view, and ask: 'Do you play baseball?'

'Uh-uh,' says Tudor, stifling a yawn, 'We prefer soccer.' He pronounces it sakkur, like a young American, which, I suppose, is what he is. He's moved on since our last meeting. We all have. Maria won custody rights but that all changed the day Gabriel offered his two sons the chance to live in New York. No brainer, my friend.

The boys dominate the chat on Skype, letting their Mom know what is cool, and what is not. They

speak in English and use American slang. Everything sucks.

Maria does not interrupt, she waits for the gaps, asks permission to change the subject. Her English is not as fluent. Her status has been eroded. Time has chewed at the family landscape and created a new one, in which Mom sounds rather lost.

She takes refuge in the familiar, and updates them on her boyfriend Jean Luc, the visiting professor with the summerhouse in the Camargue. She tells them he's a wonderful person, so interesting. Do they want to visit France, for bird watching?



Tudor grunts: uh-uh. Răzvan's response is less easy to fathom because he has acquired that ubiquitous, post-modern, strangulated mid-Atlantic speech pattern where every utterance ends in a chilled-out rock-star rasp. Not so much American, as Americroak, because presumably life is one long drag, sometimes on a joint. Maria slips into Romanian and the boys are quieter now, finally letting her talk.

I hear a deep purring from Maria's loyal ginger cat, basking in the sun, stretched along her desk, watching me slit-eyed as if to say what's the problem? I tickle its tummy. No problem, except I forget your name. The cat squints: Try Berlioz.

I spot a blur of movement onscreen and recognise Gabriel's distinctive arched eyebrows: life is full of surprises. He's wearing a shirt and tie, shaven-headed with a dark tuft of jazzy beard. He seems a lot skinnier these days. He gawps out at me.

'Hey Mike, is that really you?'

Maria departs, promising tea while I chat with her ex-husband, catching up. Our questions fire in all directions, like a pinball machine at full tilt.

'So Gabi, how do you like being a lawyer in Long Island?'

'Win some, lose some. You're giving a seminar in Cluj, I hear?'



'About ethnic minorities, for journalists.'

'The Hungarian question,' he says, one step ahead of me, 'How's it going?'

'Feisty,' I tell him, 'But it's not Rwanda.'

Maria returns with my mug of tea. As she enters, I catch the sound of someone chopping vegetables in the kitchen, probably her father. I can smell fried onions too. Perhaps I should go and help him, give Maria some privacy. I rise from the seat, wave goodbye to Gabi and the boys then move to the door, past a hoard of framed photos.

In one of them, Maria, Răzvan and Tudor are wearing T-shirts and shorts, sucking gargantuan ice creams in Times Square. In another photo, they're dressed for skiing in Transylvania, laughing into the camera on some snowy slope. The sun has dazzled the lens but the effect seems just right. Equally appropriate are the photos that someone has carefully cropped with scissors: there's no Gabi, anywhere.

At the door, I spot Maria's PhD, yellowing in a dusty frame. I look back at her, signalling my intentions: I'll be in the kitchen. But Maria seems oblivious.

She is talking to her sons in Romanian. She looks unhappy, almost bewildered at their inability to keep up. There is impatience in her voice, as if a truth has finally dawned on her after years of ominous signs: her sons are losing interest in their mother tongue. They forget words and stumble over phrasing, even Răzvan, top of every class. Worse, they do not seem to care. Their efforts are stilted and Tudor keeps sliding into English with a New York accent: ''Coz, it's kinda more natural, Mom.'

Maria's tears glitter like jewels in the afternoon sun. I leave her and walk along the gloomy corridor to the kitchen. There will be soup later, just like old times.

[Written in English]

Paul Sohar

The Tram in the Old City



The tram comes like a shark on the attack,
slithering around a bend in the boulevard,
barely missing the long tram-stop isle,
this solid sandbar in the torrential flow
of traffic. But I don't have my desert isle
to myself very long, in minutes other
shipwrecked passengers throng it until
the shark swallows all of us.
The cliffs of the grand apartment houses
look down on the scene with stern
indifference,
with the wisdom of standing still
on the same spot
for a hundred years.

[Written in English]

Ioana Ieronim

Church on Wheels



Here I am, carrying again
my folding altar along
as Romanian farmers used to
when they mounted their wooden churches
like carts on wheels
and voided the land
fled from barbarian invasions
up the mountains.

[Written in English]

Christopher Bakken

Strada C. A. Rosetti



Far too quiet last night out on the street.
Dreams of police. Today we hog four chairs
in a café off Revolution Square,
where solitude and expensive coffee
agitate our collective memory.

The man in the blue bathrobe, he is ours,
blabbering, twisted like an ampersand
on his perch between bank and bar: one hand
on his cane, the other held out for beer.
He hasn't had a shave in nineteen years.

We claim the palaces and museums,
the royal portraits on the Atheneum,
but blame the stray dogs and immigrant scum
on the old regime, whose blank bravado



still hardens all the faces in the Metro.

This week the diplomats and presidents
will affirm Europe's doctrine in the East;
the yellow stars of the Union will increase
another star or two, new flags to cover
the old murals, the sickles and hammers.

Still, some things along Strada C. Rosetti
blur more than they clarify: budding trees
compete with wide Ottoman balconies
for the right to make shade. Light, meanwhile,
stagnates in a satellite dish. All style

is sacrificed to communication,
all music to the traffic's cloying hiss.
The beautiful civil servant knows this,
since she works with facts, and yet her high heels
and headphones imply there's something she feels

we all feel—we want to hear ourselves think,
we want to rise above the uniform
sidewalk blocks. The old cobblestones were torn



up years ago, along with the mansions
and monasteries. The old city was done

being old, we were informed. Not that we asked.
Those who were shot have had twenty years
to make peace with the silence they silenced here,
the dictator's noise muffled with a noose,
his concrete horizon left to remind us

what it takes to scare the mind out of a man.
We want to see ourselves too. The police
block every street today, but they are our police.
Neither gypsy dogs nor glue-sniffing teens
can take that from us. We know it means

something now to sit and read a book,
to read something true. Yes, we want to be
seen, but don't want to be watched—this, the relief
of a generation who couldn't say, but knew
the National Library belonged to them too.

There are five real newspapers to read now
and a sign across the street can advertise



LEGAL TRANSLATIONS, but it's still not wise
to have speech handled by professionals.
Better now to just shut up, pay the bill,
join the amateur rabble on the street,
or claim our place along the balustrade.
Just outside, the uniformed riot squad
is shoring up its bulletproof phalanx.
The anarchists will refuse to break ranks,

will affirm their faith in all disorder.
Yes, we've had disorder here. On this square
in fact, here on display, the souvenir
of a body politic that has a soul:
our library, still pocked with bullet holes.

[Written in English]

Ion Munteanu

Poemul casei

îşi ţine acoperişul în doi stâlpi umblători
în tată şi în mamă
cu linişte sunt văruiţi pereţii ei
şi mângâierea podului de palmă

iar câinele curţii păzeşte la poartă
şi latră tristeţi ce migrează
pendula cu timpul se joacă în noapte
secundele prin faţa ei defilează

pe ţigle se lasă stele-n odihnă
şi pacea se-adună, ca mana...
îmi las în neştire sărutul pe casă,
iar casa e tata şi mama
iar casa e tata şi mama

Home

Hers is a house that walks on stilts, taking its time
Like the pendulum of the clock on the mantelpiece
As it ticks from side to side like the one last leaf
Of autumn falling, describing a ladder of smiles...

Hers is a house that walks on stilts, its walls being
Whitewashed with silence and with the shadows
Of kisses that sway and bloom in the candlelight
Before taking leave of their senses and ascending into the rafters...

Hers is a house that walks on stilts, having a dog
At the door who barks at the long migration of sorrows
But who cannot hear each tiny tap as a star settles down
On the tiles to sleep, making a house that glows for all to see
In this, the darkest of nights.

[Translated into English by Andrew Elliott]

Helena Drysdale

Ana, Camil, Niculina and Me



Any of the customers could have been them. Ana's black curly hair and slightly protruding brown eyes; Camil's sallow skin; their neat straight-haired daughter. As each customer approached the bar, we watched for a turn of the head, a flash of recognition, but their eyes glassed over us. Would we be recognised? They hadn't seen our daughter since babyhood; now she was nearly seventeen.

I had met them in 1991, having made the same train journey via London, Paris, Budapest. I was en route to Râmnicu Valcea, south west of Bucharest. They had tumbled laughing and panting into the compartment — had only just made it. Ana was dark and fine-featured, like a Welsh woman, and Niculina had dimpled white cheeks, a mole on her chin and an expressive curving mouth. When they discovered I spoke English Ana quivered with excitement. How wonderful! We are studying English! Niculina, say something!

I was looking for George, a Romanian poet-priest I had fallen in love with twelve years before that. We had met while travelling with two student friends, and he — recklessly — had abandoned his job to join us on a wild road trip through the Carpathians. We had planned a night of comfort in the Hotel Alutus, Râmnicu Vâlcea. George was wearing our clothes, and in



his foreigner disguise we drank țuică and danced in the hotel restaurant, and then hoped he would stroll nonchalantly past the reception desk to spend a night, illegally, with us upstairs. Instead he fled. We three carried on upstairs as if nothing had happened, and much later, long after midnight, we found him in a park. He was crouched beneath a tree, rigid with fear. He couldn't move. In the morning the bedroom door opened, and there was George carrying breakfast on a tray. Wakey wakey. We never discovered exactly what had happened.

We parted at the frontier, he returning home via Arad, us to Cambridge for the autumn term. A long correspondence followed (one letter was ninety-two pages long). He tried to escape but failed; he asked me to marry him to get him out of the country, but that failed too. He fell ill, told me not to contact him again, joined the securitate.

Now, twelve years on and one year after the revolution, I had come back. I was re-visiting some of our places to try to make sense of what went on, and to get some idea of the geography — physical, political and emotional. I wanted to get to know the country a little before meeting him again.

The Hotel Alutus, however, would have to wait, because I had been taken hostage by Ana and Niculina.

'Please. Niculina would be so disappointed. Wouldn't you?'

'Oh yes!' The eleven-year-old hugged my arm. I'd been travelling alone, struggling in fledgling Romanian: it was lovely to be wanted.

Sun softened the bleak vistas of flat blocks, many half-built, all identical. As we walked to their block, Ana and Niculina pointed out the few remaining older buildings — churches mostly — which were the only reminders that this town was more than ten years old. They wanted me to like the place, but knew I couldn't. Modernism had drained it of colour and

character. It was as if history couldn't stand it there any longer and had upped and left.

I tried not to inhale the stench of gas emanating from the sprawl of power stations and chemical plants that ringed the town.

At their block both lift and stairwell lights had broken, so we shouldered their shopping and my luggage and felt our way through the darkness up all twelve flights. Ana was a physics teacher and Camil managed a factory employing 6000 people, but their two-roomed apartment was tiny. The sitting room was crammed with the heavy veneer bookcase and display cabinet which I would see in almost every house. Two corduroy easy chairs unfolded each night to become Ana and Camil's bed, but lack of space forced them to sleep stuffed half under the table. Niculina had the only bedroom, which was just large enough for a desk and sofa bed. The windowless bathroom was often without water, while the kitchen sink had a tap that continually streamed.



This family fed and nurtured me. They took me sight-seeing, introduced me to relatives and friends, and I enjoyed feeling like their prize. Ana was often tired; she worked full time, cooked, cleaned. Her Hungarian mother helped by queuing for food, but Camil worked all hours. He was struggling to restructure his company in the switch from a planned to a market economy, which meant redundancies and battles against public opinion, the public being of the opinion that he was destroying the local industry. At weekends he went fishing.

After I left, their warmth and generosity sustained me. I needed that in the darker times when my search for George took me down into Romania's underworld, into a chilling labyrinth filled with paranoia and lies.

When they rounded the corner at last — Ana's curly hair grey now, Camil speaking



fluent English and working for a different, better, company, Niculina a married woman of thirty — I wondered how I could have been in doubt. It wasn't just the faces, but the turns of phrase, tones of voice. 'How are you? You are tired! We must to have a coffee!' The warm surprised anxious laugh.

Râmnicu Vâlcea had a new glitzy shopping centre with piped muzak. Their tinny Dacia, a rust bucket on wheels, had been upgraded to the latest super-fast model. Despite the grey hair, Ana looked younger than she did, less weary, and Camil's new job gave him more time to be with her. They had bought some fields where they grew apples and kept dogs. Best of all, their grim little apartment had been exchanged for a plot of land right in the centre of town where they had built a country cottage complete with kitchen garden, cats, a hedgehog, all private and secure within its high-walled enclosure.

In 1964 the Communists had expropriated this land from Camil's family. He showed us photos of the old house on the site, in classical Oltenian style with its white stucco arcade, where his Greek grandfather, a baker, had perfected his pastries. Portraits of his grandparents lined the walls. The Communists had pulled down the house, but some time after the 1989 revolution Camil had got back the site.

In the warm July evening our two families sat on their terrace to eat dinner — abundant meat and fish, exquisite patisserie. A sprinkler arced over the lawn and one of three flat screen TVs flickered in the background. It wasn't all good. There were the new cars that so polluted the streets that Ana no longer felt able to walk to work. There was the flurry of rural building work that was destroying the exquisite Oltenian timber houses and barns (what Communism had not destroyed, capitalism was doing instead). And there was, I sensed, regret for the closeness and intensity of the old days. Camil and Ana had struggled to get Niculina out of the



country, to better herself with study abroad, and as a result she had married a Frenchman and lived in Berlin. They rarely saw their beloved only child. In fact, amongst all their 'intellectual' friends, there wasn't a single family who hadn't lost their children to better-paid jobs in Paris, London, Stockholm. To be left in Romania was to be left behind. It was a sign of failure.

Nevertheless, things had improved, surely?

'All this, your house, your fields, are like a symbol of the new Romania.' It was a trite remark, but I felt so moved by the improvements in their fortunes.

'Not exactly,' Camil said. He explained that what was important to him was not just the loveliness of their new home; it was being able to restore the link with his own past, and that of his country.

'But like a rope when it's broken, you re-tie it, and there's always a knot. The rope's never the same again.' Whatever we do, he added, pouring a second glass of țuică, the present will always be warped.

[Written in English]

Carmen Firan

Farsa

Când am ajuns acasă i-am găsit pe ai mei în plină meditaţie. Se întorsese Alexei. În cele patru colţuri ale sufrageriei ardeau lumânări şi beţişoare de santal. Sonia şi Petru stăteau în poziţii yoga ţinându-l de mână pe Alexei care murmura ceva fără-ndoială magic. Laura mi-a făcut semn să-i las în pace, m-a sărutat în fugă, m-a tras în bucătărie şi m-a lămurit:

— A sunat Alexei. A venit pentru mai mult timp în oraş. Copiii l-au adus acasă şi insistă să-l ţinem la noi.

— Cât timp?

— A, nu mult. O săptamână, două. Îşi deschide cabinet. Nu cred că ne deranjează, iar copiii sunt foarte fericiţi. Ne face bine tuturor. Pe mine pur si simplu m-a vindecat de durerile de spate.

În bucătărie mirosea bine. Eram obosit şi îmi era

The Farce

When I got home, I found my folks in deep meditation. Alexei the Bessarabian had returned. In the four corners of the living room, lit candles and sticks of sandalwood stood watch as my teenage kids, Sonia and Petru, sat in yoga positions, holding hands with Alexei who muttered something, no doubt magical. Laura, my wife, motioned for me to leave them alone, gave me a hurried kiss, and pulled me to the kitchen.

'Alexei called,' she explained. 'He returned to Bucharest for a longer stay. The children insisted we let him stay with us.'

'For how long?'

'Not too long. Maybe a week or two. He is going to open a private office in the city.'

'What kind of office?'

'Spiritual … or a healing office. Something like that. I don't think he will be in our way and the children are very

foame.

—Ce găteşti?

—Spaghete. Mâncarea preferată a lui Alexei. După rețeta lui, cu usturoi şi măghiran.

Mi-a aratat apoi niste tuburi cu medicamente.

—Uite ce ne-a adus. Un fel de multivitamine cu antioxidante şi tot felul de ierburi miraculoase. Se fabrică undeva în America dupa formule vechi chinezeşti. Nu se găsesc pe piață. Se distribuie prin circuit închis. Alexei spune că întăresc sistemul imun şi pot vindeca orice. Nu e drăguț că ni le-a făcut cadou?

—Ba da, e drăguț.

De fapt mă bucuram că Alexei va sta un timp la noi. Toți treceam printr-o criză. Eu, printr-una de timp. Eram de dimineață până seara la ziar, lucram şi week-endurile, iar serile eram ba în talk-showuri la televiziune, ba la recepții.

Copiii treceau printr-o criză de identitate. Nu vedeau aici niciun viitor şi încercau disperați să găsească portițe de a pleca în America. Aplicau la colegii, căutau pe internet burse. Erau dezamagiți de ce se întâmplă la noi, tensionați, debusolați, nefericiți.

Cu Laura comunicam tot mai greu. Se afla într-o altă criză de vârstă. Se plângea că e singură şi neînțeleasă, folosită

happy. He is doing us all good. Take me, for instance: he's healed me of my backache.'

The kitchen smelled good. I was tired and hungry.

'What are you cooking?' I asked

'Spaghetti. Alexei's favourite dish. Made according to his own recipe, with garlic. Look what he brought us,' she said, showing me some tubes filled with pills.

'Multivitamins with antioxidants and all kinds of miracle herbs. They are made somewhere in South America based on some ancient Chinese formulas. You can't buy them on the open market. Alexei says they strengthen the immune system and can heal any illness. Isn't it sweet of him to give us these gifts?'

'It sure is.'

In fact, I really was glad Alexei was staying with us. Freedom had come with a price as we all tried to imitate the Western World, including its clichés and alienation. As a result, we each had our own crisis. Mine was a time crisis. I slaved at the office, working on the paper from morning till night, even weekends. The evenings were consumed with television talk shows or with attending business parties.

The children were going through an identity crisis. They saw no future here and were desperate to go to America. They

şi neimportantă. Întreprinderea ei era în faliment.

Mai nou descoperise feminismul şi mă teroriza cu tot felul de teorii. Intrase în Asociaţia Femeilor Libere cu Diplomă Universitară, se ducea la întâlniri, seminarii, ţinea conferinţe şi de fiecare dată se întorcea şi mai montată pe mine. Citea tot felul de cărţi care o învăţau cum să ajungă o femeie de succes, cum să fie fericită, cum să iubească, cum să-şi salveze relaţia cu partenerul. Adică eu. Devenisem principalul ei adversar şi cobaiul la îndemână pe care îşi exersa emanciparea, nervii, lecturile din Chopra, bazaconiile pe care i le băgau femeile acelea în cap. Îl adora pe John Gray şi ţinea pe noptieră best-sellerul *Bărbaţii se trag din Marte, femeile din Venus*, în locul bibliei şi lângă fotografia copiilor. Se schimbase mult, avea o încrâncenare pe care nu i-o cunoscusem până atunci, de activistă mereu în alertă, sub pretextul căutarii echilibrului.

Asculta în continuu casete cu muzică de relaxare, cu îndemnuri spre armonia universală, iubirea aproapelui, triumful binelui şi înălţare spirituală. Ce e mai grav e că îşi pierduse umorul, nu îşi mai dădea seama de penibilul în care se scufunda cu fiecare zi, cu o personalitate labilă, manipulabilă prin slăbiciunea de a se lăsa cucerită de tot felul de farse colective înscenate de experţi în teoria cuplului şi

sent countless applications to colleges and scoured the Internet for scholarships.

My communication with my wife Laura was harder and harder. She was going through her own crisis, related to her age. She complained that she felt lonely, misunderstood, used, and unimportant. The institute where she worked was on the verge of bankruptcy.

On top of everything else, after the fall of communism, she discovered feminism and terrorized me with all kinds of weird theories. She had just joined the Association of Free Women and regularly attended their meetings and lectures. Every time she came back from such events she was even more antagonistic towards me. She read a lot of books that taught her how to be a successful woman, how she could be happy, and how she could love and save her relationship with her partner. That was me. I had become her main adversary and a convenient guinea pig on whom she could practice her emancipation, her frayed nerves, and the wisdom she gleaned from reading Chopra and a whole parcel of other strange stuff those women crammed down her throat. She kept the bestseller *Men Are from Mars, Women from Venus* on her nightstand right next to a photograph of the children. She was constantly listening to relaxation music on cassettes, peppered

profeţi cu morgă care dominau scena internaţională făcând milioane de pe urma naivilor nefericiţi în căutarea eului, copilului interior, jumătăţii astrale.

Ajunsesem încetul cu încetul dezbinaţi, însinguraţi, căutându-ne fiecare refugiu în altă parte şi ascunzându-ne unul de altul sentimentele, neliniştile şi preocupările.

Aşa că am vazut şi eu în Alexei un salvator temporar al relaţiilor noastre şi l-am înconjurat cu atenţie şi prietenie. Stăteam cu el în bucătărie serile târziu bând ceaiul pe care ni-l prepara din tot felul de rădăcini şi frunze şi aveam lungi discuţii despre orice. Ne povestea despre cartea la care scria, despre proiectul pentru care venise acum, să deschidă în ţară un lanţ de institute de valeologie. Ne trata pe fiecare pentru afecţiunile de care suferea. Ghicea în palmă, în cafea, în cărţi, în rune spre fericirea Laurei şi delectarea copiilor. Cu ei făcea şi şedinţe de meditaţie şi concentrare, de relaxare şi hipnoză prin care spunea că îi întăreşte psihic, îi eliberează de spaime şi complexe, le educă voinţa şi le programează subconştientul spre succes şi reuşită.

Ziua Alexei era mai tot timpul plecat. Ajunsese cunoscut în Capitală pentru puterile lui vindecatoare şi era chemat de diverşi oameni în suferinţă, plătit bine şi recomandat şi altora. Era renumit şi pentru viziunile şi

with calls for universal harmony, love, immortality, the victory of good over evil, and spiritual exaltation.

In short, she had changed a lot. Under the pretext of seeking equilibrium, she had become a constantly alert activist, displaying a stubbornness and wild determination I had not known her to possess.

Under these circumstances I too saw in Alexei a temporary saviour of our relationship and therefore treated him with consideration and friendship. I spent many hours with him in the kitchen, often late into the night, drinking the tea he prepared for us from roots and leaves. He treated each of us for our various illnesses. To the delight of Laura and the children, he read palms, coffee grounds, and cards. He also held meditation and concentration sessions with them, through which he claimed he strengthened their psyche, released them from fears and anxieties, strengthened their will, and programmed their subconscious mind for success and achievements.

Our world was a genuine paradise for Alexei. Everyone was ready to believe anything. He soon became famous in Bucharest for his healing powers. He came highly recommended, and many people called upon him for assistance, paying very well for his services. His visions and

premonițiile lui. Doar ținând o fotografie în mână putea spune cam totul despre persoana respectivă, ghicindu-i inclusiv relațiile cu cei apropiați, trecutul, viitorul sau data morții.

Trăia auster. Bea multe ceaiuri, mânca paste cu usturoi, ciocolată şi fructe. Nu părea să sufere nici de frig, nici de căldură. Iarna se îmbraca lejer, iar vara purta cămăşi groase cu eterne buzunare încăpătoare. Cam o dată pe săptămână dădea fuga la munte. Ne spunea că în Carpați există două vârfuri unde câmpul electro-magnetic este maxim, pe o axă care leagă într-un triunghi America Latină de Asia. În Carpați, credea el, se întâmplau tot felul de lucruri ciudate. Nu prea ştiam la ce se referea, dar îi dădeam dreptate. Se încărca acolo cu energie, lua trenul şi în două ore era înapoi în Capitală.

Uneori pleca nopțile de acasă şi revenea spre dimineață mort de oboseală. Se refăcea rapid după numai două-trei ore de somn. Nu l-am întrebat niciodată unde se duce, ce face, dacă se întâlneşte cu cineva. La noi acasă nu-l căuta nimeni la telefon, iar el suna doar de la telefoane publice.

Într-o noapte am rămas cu Laura până târziu să vedem un film. Tocmai ne pusesem cablu şi puteam prinde o

premonitions became front-page news. Due to his rare gift, he had spent several years working for the Parapsychology Institute in Moscow. Although not a religious people, we were overly given to superstitions and therefore easy to manipulate. We were constantly oscillating between the magical and the farcical, between the fantastic and the surreal.

A lot of paranormal literature, forbidden during the dark years of dictatorship, was being finally published, and all kinds of healers appeared. There was little to differentiate among religion, superstition, and magic. We were living the end of a century marked by the re-emergence of religious wars. Sectarian fanatics and false messiahs, no more than murderers wearing crosses around their necks, converted their psychic collapse into divine grace. They crisscrossed our country, made fertile ground because poverty increasingly gave rise to superstitions and the need for miracles. In their turn, the politicians worshiped with two hands, never missing a chance to appear on television attending a church service, surrounded by two or three Orthodox priests. Despite the fact that not too long ago they had been atheists, they popularized the cliché: 'So may God help us!'

It was a beautiful April day in Bucharest, right before Easter. In the city's Palace Square, scene of the 1989 Revolution,

mulțime de canale, inclusiv HBO. Ne-am amintit de vremurile bune când ne petreceam nopţile în faţa videoului, pe atunci marfă de contrabandă. De la Revoluţia din decembrie rămăsese neatins. Nici cărți nu mai citisem de atunci. Timpul curgea altfel, iar aria de interes se schimbase. Citeam munţi de ziare, iar la televizor ne uitam doar la talk-showurile politice.

Copiii erau la o petrecere, iar Alexei plecase în grabă la una din misterioasele lui escapade nocturne. Afară turna cu găleata. Am auzit cheia răsucindu-se în uşă şi am iesit în hol. Umbra lui Alexei se întindea disproporţionat de mare pe zidul de la intrare. Am rămas cu ochii pironiţi pe figura lui. Hainele îi erau ude leoarcă iar faţa îi strălucea de o lumină ciudată care venea parcă din interior. Ochii albaştri aveau reflexe metalice. Mi s-a parut înfricoşător de înalt. Laura a alergat în baie şi a venit cu un prosop. Alexei tăcea şi nu se mişca din cadrul uşii. Laura a rămas împietrită cu prosopul în mână. Voise să-i şteargă faţa de ploaie cu tandrețea pe care i-o arăta în mod obişnuit, dar nu mai era capabilă de niciun gest. Firele de apă i se scurgeau prin barba roşcată şi cădeau cu zgomot direct pe gresia din hol. Îl priveam ca şi cum atunci l-am fi întâlnit prima oară. Nu regăseam nimic din blândețea cu care ne obişnuise. Era altul. Emana atâta forță

tens of thousands of people gathered early in the morning. The trade union confederations had reached a consensus and agreed to call a big strike that disrupted all kinds of essential services. Stands and barricades had been installed. There were microphones and bullhorns everywhere. The area was surrounded by trucks, taxis, and buses on strike. Elsewhere, the streets were crowded with people headed toward the Square, some holding children's hands, others with dogs on leashes. The law enforcement people were on alert. The ruling government was afraid it might be forced to resign under pressure from the masses.

This general strike gave people a convenient excuse to leave their homes and get some fresh air while nostalgically looking back on the old days, before the May Day parade was cancelled, when they had attended all those public rallies under communism — the military parades, the waving of flags, the hoola hoops, the placards, the slogans, the portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and those of the family of the national dictators. Afterwards, they would eat hot dogs and drink beer at the many booths erected everywhere to boost their sense of holiday. Today the parading crowds carried placards saying 'Down with the government' and an assortment of trade union demands, as well as the new slogans characteristic of the

şi mister încât ne simţeam striviţi. Şi deodată apa a început să se usuce pe el. Aşa, din senin. Îi ieşeau aburi din piele. În câteva secunde era complet uscat. Am luat prosopul din mâna Laurei şi am tras-o după mine în sufragerie. Ne-am aşezat tăcuţi pe canapea în faţa televizorului fără să mai pricepem nimic din filmul care rula. Îl auzeam pe Alexei la baie, apoi uşa de la dormitorul lui s-a închis şi am răsuflat uşuraţi. N-am comentat niciodată stranietatea din acea noapte. A doua zi ne-a aşteptat cu ceaiul de ierburi miraculoase gata făcut în bucătărie. Avea zâmbetul pe care i-l ştiam, puţin trist, îşi reluase dimensiunea şi aerul normal. Nu ne-a dat nicio explicaţie. De altfel nu se întâmplase nimic.

Lumea noastră era un adevărat paradis pentru Alexei. Toţi erau dispuşi să creadă orice. Nu eram un popor prea credincios, dar înclinat puternic spre superstiţii. Oscilam între magie şi farsă, între fantastic şi suprarealism.

Se publica multă literatură paranormală, apăruseră tot felul de tămăduitori, la televizor îşi făceau reclamă bătrâne ghicitoare, ţigănci gata să rezolve orice, de la căsătorii, câştiguri la loto, impotenţă, intrări în parlament, la eliberarea de duhuri rele şi nenoroc.

Între religie, superstiţie şi magie nu erau mari diferenţe. Trăiam un timp în care reapăruseră războaiele

transition society, which included all manner of ironic remarks making fun of the emerging democracy and various government leaders.

By noon, hundreds of thousands of people had gathered around the marble pedestal in the Square, which used to support a gargantuan statue of Lenin pointing his finger threateningly towards the East. Right after the Revolution, a large crane had lifted the statue from its moorings and unceremoniously dumped it into some hole outside the city. From time to time, the giant bronze statue was resurrected for use in movies or advertisements, but mostly it just rested flat on its back near a fence, overgrown with weeds, urinated on by dogs, and climbed on by children. Parents used it as a background for family pictures, as they did with the statues of stone lions and bears. On the cover of a large-circulation pornographic magazine a famous model appeared naked, standing on Lenin's head and declaring, 'I'm doing it on Lenin.'

Even so, the pedestal remained well anchored to the ground in the Square, the statue having been replaced by a cross in memory of the revolutionaries who had lost their lives in December 1989. I showed up to the rally with two photo reporters from our paper and found a spot near the big stand

religioase. Criminali cu cruce pe piept, fanatici sectari şi falşi messiah îşi transferau labilitatea psihică în har divin. Şi mulţi bântuiau şi prin ţara noastră în care sărăcia făcea tot mai mult loc superstiţiilor şi nevoii de miracole.

Politicienii la rândul lor se închinau cu două mâini, nu scăpau prilejul de a se arăta la televizor participând la slujbe în biserică, ţineau doi-trei popi pe lângă ei şi adoptaseră rapid formula "Aşa să ne ajute Dumnezeu!"

Prin intermediul lui Niky, Alexei pătrunsese în cele mai înalte medii politice, artistice, de afaceri. I se confesau toţi cu cele mai intime probleme legate de sănătate, profesie, ambiţii, eşecuri, intenţii de viitor iar Alexei era un bun sfătuitor, discret şi onest. Cred că ajunsese să afle destule secrete din viaţa unor personaje influente, dar nu vorbea niciodată nimic. Nu l-am auzit să facă vreun comentariu despre cineva. Noi ne simţeam privilegiaţi că locuia la noi, ne bucuram de prietenia şi tratamentul lui special şi speram ca ceva din aura şi forţa lui să se răsfrângă şi asupra noastră.

Ajunsese să câştige foarte mulţi bani, pe care îi ţinea pentru lanţul de institute de valeologie pe care voia să le deschidă în câteva oraşe mari, fireşte susţinut din afară de specialişti în domeniu. Nu prea ştiam cu se ocupă valeologia, dar bănuiam că era vorba de vreo terapie paranormală. Nu

where law enforcement personnel had reserved space for the media.

The meeting started off with three priests leading the demonstrators in saying the Lord's Prayer. It was the only moment with some solidarity and order. Immediately after the blessing of the priests and the obligatory 'So may God help us!' the crowd began to vociferate impatiently.

It was hot and the agitated crowds emitted a resounding rumble. Some had come with their entire family, others accompanied by neighbours or friends, talking animatedly, laughing, smoking, or eating their packed lunches and from time to time remembering to shout whatever slogans were being urged upon them. Various union leaders, public figures, and representatives of the students' associations, as well as acclaimed intellectuals, took turns speaking into the microphone. Some read their speeches, others shouted slogans, to which the crowds responded with heckles or whistles, depending on the contents, at times clapping their hands or otherwise expressing their noisy approval. I spotted Sonia, Petru, and Alexei right next to the stand and sneaked in under the rope setting off the press area from the rest of the crowd to join them.

'We brought Alexei so he can see what our meetings are

ne dădea niciodată mai multe detalii şi nici noi nu-l plictiseam cu întrebările.

Ajunsese la şeful parlamentului, căruia îi vindecase mama, la câţiva miniştri care în scurt timp deveniseră dependenţi de tratamentul şi sfaturile lui. Nu ştiu dacă Niky exagera, dar îmi spunea că e consultat la cele mai mari niveluri, în decizii politice, probleme de stat, misiuni secrete. Şi toate predicţiile lui se adevereau. Devenise cea mai spectaculoasă prezenţă, agreată de toţi, cultivată cu atenţie şi respect. Nimeni nu-şi mai putea imagina viaţa fără Alexei. El rămânea însă în umbră, refuza interviurile în presă sau apariţiile la televiziune, modest şi cumpătat, fără ca succesul ameţitor pe care îl avea în lumea noastră să i se urce la cap.

Toate ar fi rămas într-un cerc restrâns, trecând neobservate pentru marea masă, dacă într-o zi nu s-ar fi întâmplat ceva cu adevărat senzaţional. Era o frumoasă zi de aprilie, chiar înainte de Paşti. Confederaţiile sindicale ajunseseră la un consens şi semnaseră participarea colectivă la o mare grevă care practic cuprindea majoritatea serviciilor, transporturilor, ramurilor industriale, asociaţiilor profesionale. Forţele de ordine erau în alertă. Guvernanţii se temeau să nu fie forţaţi să demisioneze sub presiunea mulţimii.

like,' Sonia explained to me.

'And what are they like,' I asked Alexei. He merely smiled.

'We won't hang around here too long,' added Petru in a bore tone. 'We'll head home.'

I winked to Alexei and he smiled again.

'Dad doesn't understand a thing,' chimed in Sonia. 'Can you let him in on it?'

Alexei nodded amused.

'Let me in on what?'

'Alexei can make things disappear.'

'Or appear,' added Petru. 'This morning he put on an astounding demonstration for our benefit. Zap, zap, off went glasses, books, even the chair!

'You've got to see this, dad! How they vanish without a trace for a few seconds. Or at least to us they appear to vanish. It's absolutely fantastic!' Sonia gushed.

I smiled benignly, not paying much attention to the children's exultations, while in the Square chaos was slowly taking over. The speakers raised their voices higher and higher and the tired crowds showed signs of impatience. Children were crying or running through the legs of the union members, agitated because of the heat and the shouting around them. In

În Piața Centrală a oraşului, care în '89 fusese scena Revoluției, se adunaseră încă de dimineață zeci de mii de oameni. Se instalaseră tribune, megafoane, microfoane, maşini cu portavoce, baricade. Piața era înconjurată de camioane şi tiruri, de taxiuri şi autobuze ale sindicatului şoferilor aflați şi ei în grevă. Străzile erau înțesate de oameni care continuau să se îndrepte spre Piață, unii de mână cu copii, alții cu câini în lesă.

Cum odată cu căderea comunismului se suspendase sărbătorirea zilei de 1 Mai, greva generală pica la timp şi era un bun pretext să mai iasă din casă, să-şi consume energia şi să-şi verse năduful, cu nostalgie pentru marile adunări populare de pe vremuri, când defilau pe muzică militară, agitând eşarfe, flori, cercuri, pancarte cu sloganuri comuniste, portretele lui Marx, Engels şi Lenin, alături de cele ale familiei de dictatori naționali. După care mâncau crenvurşti şi beau bere la tarabele instalate peste tot pentru a le întări sentimentul de sărbătoare.

De data asta purtau curajoşi pancarte pe care era scris "Jos guvernul", revendicări sindicale şi noile sloganuri ale tranziției sociale cu ironii la adresa democrației în formare şi la diverşi lideri ai partidului de guvernământ. La prânz se adunaseră sute de mii de oameni în jurul soclului de

one corner there was a bit of a stampede when someone was caught trying to steal a wallet. Several men tore into him, wrestled him to the ground, kicking him with their feet and unleashing their blind fury as though they were hitting the government.

The policemen stepped in immediately. Then a real fight erupted, with people hitting each other, very few of them knowing why or whom they were attacking. The reporters and cameramen rushed to the scene of the incident. Calls were made from the stand for violence to cease, for people to calm down or for the government to resign. The three priests stood side by side repeatedly making the sign of the cross, urging the people to drop the violence, get along with each other, love, and be humble.

Like other young people in the crowd, Sonia and Petru were having a great time. Suddenly Sonia had an idea. Hopping on one leg, she pleaded with Alexei, 'Can't you make a miracle right here? Pleeease, pleeease, do it now, and here!' Petru chuckled through a smirk at this thought. Alexei looked reluctant, but they could tell he was favourably disposed. 'Please, don't disappoint us,' Sonia insisted. 'Do it so dad can see it too.'

Alexei closed his eyes. At that moment in the square, a

marmoră din Piaţa pe care stătuse zeci de ani o imensă statuie a lui Lenin cu arătătorul îndreptat ameninţător spre Est. Imediat după Revoluţie statuia fusese demontată de macarele şi aruncată într-un parc din afara oraşului. O mai foloseau din când în când regizori de filme şi reclame. Uriaşul Lenin de bronz zăcea pe spate lângă un gard, acoperit de bălării, udat de câini şi escaladat de copii care se jucau printre urechile şi nasul lui, în timp ce părinţii le făceau poze artistice, aşa cum se întâmpla şi cu statuile de lei şi urşi de piatră. Pe coperta uneia din revistele pornografice de mare tiraj apăruse chiar un cunoscut fotomodel pozând goală pe capul lui Lenin sub titlul "Mă... aia pe Lenin".

Soclul rămăsese în Piaţă, bine înfipt în pământ, iar în locul statuii fusese pusă o cruce în memoria revoluţionarilor ucişi în decembrie '89. Am ajuns însoţit de doi fotoreporteri de la ziar şi mi-am găsit un loc în faţa tribunei, unde forţele de ordine creaseră un spaţiu pentru reprezentanţii presei. Mitingul fusese deschis de trei preoţi care invitaseră participanţii să rostească după ei "Tatăl nostru". Rândurile din faţă se puseseră în genunchi. A fost singurul moment de oarecare solidaritate şi ordine. După binecuvântarea dată de popi şi de cuvintele "aşa să ne ajute Dumnezeu!" au început vociferări nerăbdătoare.

well-known dissident from the old regime stood behind the mike, uttering the most incendiary of the speeches. Widely known among the people, he had been very active during the Revolution and still had great mass appeal. He was offering a scathing denunciation of the ruling party. Exuding charisma and authority, he electrified the crowds by announcing that the ghosts of communism still plagued our society. They suddenly fell silent, drinking in his every word.

Alexei emitted that low, guttural sound of his chanting that I knew so very well. With his eyes still closed, he concentrated his thoughts, setting himself apart from the reality around him.

Then, almost as if on cue, the hundreds of thousands of people in the Square erupted with a desperate, panic-filled shriek. Taken aback by this infernal roar, I did not at first understand what was happening. Then Sonia circled her arms around my neck and I saw: Lenin's statue had reappeared on the marble pedestal, the threatening finger once again pointing towards the East, and the cross commemorating the Revolution's victims stuck between its legs. For a few split seconds, we lost our tongues and a sepulchral silence fell over the crowd. Then just as quickly, it disappeared — along with the statue.

Era cald şi mulţimea vuia continuu. Unii veniseră în familie, însoţiţi de vecini sau prieteni, stăteau de vorbă între ei, comentau, râdeau, fumau, alţii îşi aduseseră pachetele cu mâncare şi doar când era ceva de scandat se alăturau corului general. La microfon se perindau diverşi lideri sindicali, figuri publice, invitaţi din partea asociaţiilor studenţeşti, intelectuali cu talent de oratori. Se citeau discursuri, se strigau lozinci urmate de huiduieli şi fluierături sau, după caz, de aplauze şi ţipete de satisfacţie. Chiar lângă tribună i-am văzut pe Sonia, Petru şi Alexei. M-am strecurat pe sub cordonul care despărţea presa de restul adunării şi m-am dus la ei.

—L-am adus şi pe Alexei să vadă cum e un miting la noi, mi-a explicat Sonia.

—Şi cum e? m-am adresat lui Alexei.

S-a mulţumit să-mi zâmbească.

—N-o să prea stam mult pe aici, a completat Petru plictisit. O întindem acasă.

I-a facut cu ochiul şi Alexei a zâmbit din nou.

—Tata nu înţelege nimic, a intervenit Sonia. Putem să-i spunem şi lui?

Alexei a încuviinţat din cap amuzat.

—Să-mi spuneţi ce?

Pandemonium broke out. Some ran away scared, others fell to their knees, saying the Lord's Prayer. The three priests, their hands clinging desperately to the crucifixes around their necks, scurried down from the platform. The crowd passed from consternation to panic, calling out possible explanations like tobacco auctioneers:

'It's a miracle!'

'An illusion!'

'Mass hypnosis! The Americans have David Copperfield. Didn't he make the Statue of Liberty disappear for a few seconds?'

'It's a divine sign!'

'Another trick from the government, an attempt to fool us again!'

'The end of the world is upon us!'

'Dear God, what sin have we committed? What shall befall us?'

'We are the chosen people,' preached a fanatic. 'The New Jerusalem shall rise on this land. The second coming of Christ will be here in the very blessed Square of Bucharest.'

'Make that 'cursed' square,' someone barked, preparing to throw a punch. 'Can't you tell it's a diversion? The blasted communists! When are you going to be cured of your fantasies?

—Alexei poate să facă să dispară obiecte.

—Sau să apară, a adăugat Petru. Ne-a făcut azi dimineață o demonstrație extraordinară. Hac-pac! Pahare, cărți, te-le-vi-zorul!

— Trebuie să vezi şi tu! Pur si simplu dispar fără urmă pentru câteva secunde. Sau ni se pare nouă că dispar. E fantastic! se entuziasmă Sonia.

—Ne ducem să exersăm. Eu sunt fascinată!

Am zâmbit înțelegător, fără să dau o prea mare importanță exaltării copiilor. În Piață se instala treptat dezordinea. Vorbitorii țipau din ce în ce mai tare, mulțimea obosise şi dădea semne de nerăbdare, copiii plângeau sau alergau plictisiți printre picioarele sindicaliştilor încinşi de căldură şi epuizați de strigăte. Într-un colț se produsese o busculadă. Cineva fusese prins furând un portofel. Câțiva bărbați s-au repezit la el, l-au trântit la pământ şi îi cărau picioare desfigurați de furie, imaginându-şi probabil că dau în guvern. Forțele de ordine au intervenit prompt. A ieşit o bătaie pe cinste. Nu se mai ştia cine pe cine loveşte şi de ce. Ziariştii şi fotoreporterii alergaseră şi ei la locul incidentului. De la tribună se striga acum: "Fără violență!" "Păstrați ordinea!" "Jos guvernul!" Cei trei popi, făcându-şi cruci, chemau la calm, înțelegere, iubire şi smerenie. Sonia şi Petru,

See where all your satanic ideologies brought us!'

'It's a farce!' someone offered from the sidelines.

The photo reporters, cameramen, and journalists were milling around the pedestal, taking pictures, broadcasting live from the Square for their television stations and media outlets. Meanwhile, Sonia and Petru cast a satisfied, vindicated glance at me. I did not know what to tell them. Alexei avoided my eyes, convinced that this time he had gone too far, allowing the children to push him into an error. He wanted to leave that place as quickly as possible. In our indecision, a man with tears of joy in his eyes rushed straight to Alexei and hugged him.

'You've done all this, haven't you? I know you have!' Regaining his composure, he squeezed Alexei's arm conspiratorially and went away thrilled. 'Do you know him?' asked Sonia.

'Yes, I healed his daughter of a degenerative bone disease. He thinks I'm a magician.'

I urged them to go home and collected my two colleagues from the newspaper, who had continued to photograph the pedestal from all angels, and sent them back to the office. Everybody was excited, writing article after article. For several days, the television channels continued to broadcast scenes of the crowd before and after the miracle, but no one had

asemeni altor tineri din mulțime, se amuzau copios. Şi deodată Soniei îi veni o idee şi căzu pe capul lui Alexei sărind într-un picior:

—Nu poți să faci o minune chiar aici? Hai, te rog, acum, aici!

—Da, ar fi tare! râse Petru.

Alexei îi privea suspicios deşi părea şi el bine dispus.

—Hai, te rugăm! insistă Sonia nebuneşte. Să vadă şi tata!

Alexei închise ochii. În Piață se ținea acum cel mai incendiar discurs. La microfon se afla un cunoscut dizident de pe vremea vechiului regim, o figură marcantă a vieții publice cu mare priză la mase, foarte activ şi în timpul Revoluției. Făcea un adevărat rechizitoriu al actualei guvernări, o analiză lucidă a stării națiunii. Ne vorbea despre fantasmele comunismului care încă mai bântuiau societatea noastră. Avea charismă şi autoritate. Electrizase mulțimea care devenise brusc liniştită sorbindu-i cuvintele.

L-am auzit pe Alexei scoțând sunetul acela gros pe tonalități joase. Continua să țină ochii închişi, concentrat, desprins de realitatea din jur. Şi deodată sutele de mii de oameni din Piață scoaseră un vuiet infernal. Un strigăt disperat de surpriză şi spaimă. La început n-am înțeles. Am

managed to capture a single snapshot of the miracle itself. There was no photograph or image of Lenin back on the pedestal. The dailies had a field day bringing out their own special editions featuring interviews with all manner of seers, illusionists, scientists, paranormal experts, specialists in mass hypnosis, wizards, tricksters, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and prophets who come out of the woodwork on such occasions.

Alexei had also been contacted by several reporters, but he refused to grant any interviews to the print or broadcast media, declining knowledge of the phenomenon or any involvement in the alleged miracle. The whole thing was so much part and parcel of our collective fantasy world that I didn't need to feel guilty about the secret I was harbouring, especially since no one would have believed that the young Alexei could have produced the miracle anyway. Suspicion soon fell upon occult forces plotting in high spheres.

In due course, it all became a bit of a yawn with minimal impact on the rest of the country. People were used to all sorts of strange things going on in the Capital, from the illusory terrorists of the Revolution to the miners called in to calm things down, so the re-emergence of the Lenin statue for a few split seconds impressed no one. Some in the remote parts of the

privit dezorientat în jur. Ceva sinistru trebuia să se fi întâmplat. Sonia îmi sări de gât. Pe soclul de marmoră apăruse la loc statuia lui Lenin. Cu degetul ridicat amenințător spre Est. Pentru câteva fracțiuni de secundă s-a lăsat o linişte mormântală. Toată lumea o putea vedea. Şi toți aveau ochii ieşiți din orbite de uimire. Ni se tăiase respirația. Amuțisem. Lenin era la loc pe soclu cu crucea ridicată în memoria celor uciși în Revoluție între picioare. Apoi a dispărut. Continuam să fixăm soclul din nou gol. Şi imediat a izbucnit un vacarm de nedescris. Unii fugeau speriați, alții căzuseră în genunchi spunând "Tatăl nostru", cei trei popi cu mâinile încleştate pe crucifixurile care le atârnau la gât părăsiră tribuna în grabă. Mulțimea trecuse din consternare în panică. Toți îşi dădeau cu părerea căutând explicații.

—E un miracol!

—O minune!

—Iluzionism!

—Hipnoză în masă! Lasă că şi americanii îl au pe David Copperfield. N-a făcut să dispară pentru câteva secunde Statuia Libertății?

—Da, dar e mai greu să faci să apară ceva, decât să dispară!

—E un semn divin!

country never knew the statute had been removed in the first place, but even those who had been in the Square at that moment found it hard to believe they had actually seen Lenin back on the marble slab. It might have been a visual trick, an illusion — who knows what? And who cares, anyway?! They had their own problems, like inflation and corruption. So with a well-practised shrug of the shoulders, they concluded it was yet more proof of the famous adage, 'No miracle lasts more than three days.'

[Rewritten in English by the author]

— O altă mişculaţie a guvernului să ne inducă în eroare!

— Vine sfârşitul lumii! se auzi o femeie de lânga noi.

— Doamne, Dumnezeule, cu ce-am greşit?! Acum ce ne mai aşteaptă?!

— E o farsă!

— O vedenie!

— Suntem poporul ales, propovăduia un fanatic. Pe pământul acesta se va ridica Noul Ierusalim. A doua venire a lui Cristos pe pământ va fi la noi, chiar în această Piaţă binecuvântată.

— Ba blestemată, sări altcineva, gata să-l lovească. Nu pricepeţi că e o diversiune? Comunişti împuţiţi! Nu vă mai vindecaţi odată de fantasme! Uite unde ne-au adus ideologiile voastre satanice!

Fotoreporterii şi ziariştii înconjurau soclul, făceau fotografii, transmiteau în direct imagini din Piaţă pentru canalele de televiziune.

Sonia şi Petru mă priveau satisfăcuţi. Nu ştiam ce să spun. Alexei îmi evita privirea, convins că de data asta exagerase, lăsându-se atras de copii într-o eroare. Voia să plece cât mai repede de acolo. Deodată un bărbat se năpusti spre grupul nostru. Veni direct la Alexei şi îl luă în braţe plângând de bucurie:



—Tu ai făcut asta, nu-i aşa? Ştiu că tu ai făcut-o!

Se reculese apoi, îi strânse brațul conspirativ şi plecă emoționat.

—Îl cunoşti? îl întrebă Sonia.

—Da, i-am vindecat fata de o boală osoasă degenerativă. Mă crede un magician.

I-am îndemnat să plece acasă, mi-am recuperat cei doi colegi fotoreporteri care continuau să dea ocol soclului şi ne-am dus la ziar. Toată lumea era excitată. Articolele curgeau lanț. Câteva zile televiziunile au continuat să transmită imagini ale mitingului, ale mulțimii înainte şi după miracol. Nimeni însă nu reuşise să imortalizeze în vreun fel minunea. Nu exista nicio fotografie sau vreo imagine a lui Lenin repus pe soclu. Ziarele au avut şi ele ediții speciale, interviuri cu vizionari, iluzionişti, oameni de ştiință, specialişti în paranormal şi hipnoză în masă, vrăjitori, scamatori, psihologi, sociologi, istorici, profeți. Fusese şi Alexei contactat de câțiva reporteri dar refuzase orice interviu sau apariție televizată, declinându-şi priceperea sau amestecul într-o astfel de minune. Întâmplarea era atât de fantastică, încât nu trebuia să mă simt vinovat pentru secretul pe care îl dețineam. Oricum până la urmă n-ar fi crezut nimeni că miracolul ar fi putut fi săvârşit de tânărul Alexei.



Erau bănuite forţe oculte conjugate, conspiraţii la nivel înalt.

Şi de altfel în ţară impactul minunii fusese minim. Oamenii erau obişnuiţi cu tot felul de lucruri stranii care se întâmplau în Capitală, de la Revoluţii cu terorişti la greve. Aşa că reapariţia statuii lui Lenin pentru câteva fracţiuni de secundă nu a impresionat pe nimeni. Unii nici nu ştiau că fusese dată jos. După un timp lumea începuse să se îndoiască de autenticitatea întâmplării. Chiar celor care fuseseră atunci în Piaţă le venea parcă greu să creadă că-l văzuseră cu adevărat pe Lenin înapoi pe soclu. O iluzie, o hipnoză, cine ştie! Şi cui îi mai păsa?! Aveau ei alte probleme, de la inflaţie la şomaj, aşa că zicala "orice minune ţine doar trei zile" s-a dovedit încă o dată valabilă.



Călin Torsan

Parfum de dragoste

Cezareea a muşcat din ceapă. Era una roşie, zemoasă, aşa zis de apă. Probabil că o femeie ca ea, una care purta acest nobil nume, unul consonant şi pretenţios, ar fi trebuit să gândească de două ori până să înfulece o dată. Dar ciorba de fasole o presupunea. Pe ceapă.

Şi n-ar fi fost nimic nelalocul său... Era duminică, iar ziua asta se trăieşte mai ales în casă. Singur sau cu familia. Dar Cezareea acceptase invitaţia lui Ismail. În oraş, la un film.

Pentru întâlnirea asta, bărbatul se pregătise la rându-i: mersese la Faruk Style, frizeria care îi conferi o imagine credibilă. Îmbrăcă un costum nou şi folosi apa de colonie, pe care o primise de ziua lui, ce-i drept, de la fosta soţie. Îşi pieptănă părul cu gel. Îşi cumpără un pachet cu ţigări din foi, aromate. Citi câteva rânduri din Cartea Sfântă:

The Scent of Love

Cezareea took a bite of onion. It was a red, juicy one, the one they call the water onion. A woman like her, honoured with a noble name both consonant and demanding, might perhaps have thought twice before gulping once. But the sour bean soup required it. An onion.

And after all there should have been nothing peculiarly improper about it: it was a Sunday — a day meant to be spent indoors, alone or with family. But Cezareea had accepted Ismail's invitation: she was going out to see a film.

Ismail had also prepared for the meeting by visiting 'Faruk Style', a transformational hairdresser. He wore new clothes, and birthday cologne (a gift from his former wife, to be exact). He'd put gel in his hair. He bought a pack of flavoured cigarettes. He read a few lines from the Holy Book:

Aceştia sînt cei ce fac dezbinări, (oameni) fireşti, care nu au Duhul.

Nu înțelese nimica, dar era bine, se mai liniştise.

Foamea îl răzbi cu o oră înainte. În drum spre Cezareea intră la Tufal, restaurantul sirian. Comandă full, o mâncare de fasole.

—Doriți şi ceva de băut? întrebă chelnerul, un român tânăr, încălțat cu adidaşi ieftini.

—Mmmm... Da. Un ayran.

—Simplu? Cu mentă? Cu mentă şi usturoi?

Ismail cântări puțin momentul întâlnirii cu Cezareea. Totuşi, pofta, pofta asta blestemată, care mereu ne face robi şi fasolea, fasolea asta care de fiecare dată urlă *ceapă! usturoi!*, aceeaşi care o îmboldise pe femeie să topească o ceapă întreagă, îl făcu să aleagă fără ezitare:

—Cu mentă şi usturoi.

Hăpăi ca un înfometat, ciofăi murăturile oferite gratis, după care gâlgâi albeața puturoasă. Râgâi satisfăcut, uşor, cât să nu-l audă nimeni. Tot timpul gândindu-se şi la Cezareea. Plăti, lăsă bacşiş, după care se ridică semeț de la masă, redobândindu-şi credibilitatea spoită cu gel.

These are they, who separate themselves, sensual men, having not the Spirit.

He hadn't understood a word, but he was all right, he had calmed down.

Hunger ploughed in one hour earlier, and on his way to Cezareea he popped into Tufal's Syrian restaurant and ordered the full bean dish.

'Anything to drink?' the waiter asked, a young Romanian wearing cheap sneakers.

'Mmmm... Yes — an ayran.'

'Straight? With mint? Mint and garlic?'

Ismail thought for a minute about son meeting Cezareea. But gluttony, that cursed gluttony that one can't resist — and beans, the meal that absolutely requires onion and garlic! — got the better of him, the same as it had urged the woman to devour her onion, made him choose without hesitation:

'Mint and garlic.'

He shovelled it all down like a starving man, finished off the free pickles, slurped the stinking white juice. He belched happily, softly, so that nobody could hear him. His thoughts were with Cezareea all this time. He paid, he left a tip, then got up from the table haughtily, regaining his credibility tinned with gel.

***

Femeia se îndreptă către biserica armenească. Se întunecase, iar luciul gheții multiplica pași și gânduri zburând ca păsările. Se întunecase, iar felinarele abia aprinse dezvăluiau pe fețele trecătorilor griji și patimi.

O patimă o fi fost și pofta asta, de neoprit, care pusese stăpânire pe Cezareea. Trecu pe lângă șaormeria din colț, iar mirosul care se strecura printre termopanele tejghelei avea ceva din vraja de nepătruns a duhului din lampa lui Aladin. O trase de nări, băgându-i mâna înmănușată în buzunarul paltonului, făcând-o să caute ceva mărunțiș.

Apucă sandvișul avidă, așa cum gospodina înșfacă orătania din ogradă. Era cald, ca o inimă dogorind de iubire. Cea a lui Ismail? Era cu de toate. Așa o întrebase vânzătorul:

—Cu de toate?

Și așa răspunse și ea: *Cu de toate*. Cu varză, cu castraveți murați, cu maioneză, cu ketchup picant, *dar puneți și puțin dulce*, cu cartofi prăjiți și, lucru mai grav, având în vedere întâlnirea de

***

The woman was on her way to the Armenian church. It was getting dark. The slippery ice multiplied the steps and her thoughts were flying like birds. It had grown dark, and in the in the light of the street lamps one could now see the faces of the passers by, with their worries and passions.

This unstoppable lust that possessed Cezareea must have been such a passion. She passed by the shaorma shop at the corner, and the smell that was sneaking along the double-glazed window that served as counter had something of the secret magic of the djinn locked in Aladdin's lamp. It caught her nostrils, and made her gloved hand get into the pocket of the coat, in search of some small change.

She grabbed the sandwich greedily, as the housewife grabs at poultry in the yard. It was warm, like a heart burning with love. Ismail's? It had everything on it. The shop-assistant had asked:

'With everything?'

And her answer had been: 'With everything'. Onion, pickled cucumbers, mayonnaise, spicy ketchup, "a little sweet ketchup, too, please", fried potatoes and, perhaps surprising in

peste câteva minute cu bărbatul care părea că o interesează, cu ceapă şi sos de usturoi.

Înfulecă repede. Ceva sos i se scurse pe haina din blană. Alburiu, spermă zici că era. Îl făcu să dispară repede, cu ajutorul unui şervețel umed. Deşi femeie, şi una aparent elegantă, cocoțată pe tocuri, rujată şi parfumată, râgâi voluptuos, iar din gâtlejul său se înălțară către cerul înstelat lighioane înfiorătoare.

***

Ismail o aştepta. Se bâțâia uşor, de pe un picior pe altul, ca unul care nu mai are răbdare. Mesteca febril o gumă mentolată. Degeaba... Putoarea care îi îmbălsămase tractul intestinal îşi făcea simțită prezența.

—Sărut mâinile, Cezareea.

O întâlnire banală, între doi oameni fireşti, dintr-aceia care fac dezbinările.

Femeia se cruci de halena dezvoltată de Ismail. Totuşi, se abținu la a-şi face cruce, ca să nu-l jignească pe musulman.

—Bună seara.

the light of her meeting in just a few minutes the man she was interested in — with onion and garlic dressing.

She scoffed it quickly. Some dressing ran down the fur of her coat. Whitish, sperm like. She made it disappear quickly with a wet wipe. Although a woman, and a seemingly elegant one, perched on high heels, wearing lipstick and perfume, she belched voluptuously, and from her throat gruesome creatures lifted towards the starred sky.

***

Ismail was waiting for her. He was shifting his weight from one foot to another, like an impatient man. He was chewing feverishly on mint gum. It was all in vain. The stench which had reached his intestinal tract made its presence felt.

'How are you, Cezareea?

An ordinary meeting, between two normal people, who end up in separation.

She was simply shocked by the smell of Ismail's breath, but she refrained from making the sign of the cross — which she did in circumstances like this — in order not to offend his Muslim sensibilities.

'Good evening!'

Bărbatul amuți. Combinația de ceapă și usturoi, cea dezvoltată de cavitatea bucală a femeii, îl năuci, îl făcu să vorbească prostii, aşa cum fac de obicei bărbații îndrăgostiți, făcând să şchioapete puțin din limba română:

—Mă pucur să te levăd!

Femeia îşi ascunse nasul în fular.

Traversară mai multe străduțe, două umbre încercând să devină una singură. Noaptea fereca uşile, oamenii se retrăgeau în case, iar vântul slab începea să poarte miresme de primăvară.

—Am rezervat o masă la restaurantul libanez. E aici, abroabe, în Piața Rosetti.

Cezareea se bucură, rotunji a mirare litera O cu buzele rujate strident, deşi mațele-i abia începuseră să rumege mâncarea molfăită. Numai de haleală nu mai avea chef.

Până la local nu vorbiseră, robi ai acelei tăceri care se aşterne adesea între oamenii puțin obişnuiți unii cu alții. Ascundeau, de fapt, miasmele care le bântuiau gurile. Dar păreau interesanți, aşa, tăcând, purtați în adâncul serii de o gravitate proprie adulților, fie ei şi îndrăgostiți. Sau pe cale de a se îndrăgosti.

Uşa restaurantului scârțâi, ca o ceapă decojită de lama

It was the turn of the man to be left speechless. The smell of onion and garlic coming from the woman's oral cavity, dumbfounded him, made him talk foolishly, like all men in love, mispronouncing the Romanian words:

'I am glat to shee you again!'

She hid her nose in her scarf.

They crossed several small streets, two shadows trying to become one. It was the night, the doors were being locked up, people withdrew to their homes, and the mild wind smelled like spring.

'I made dinner reservation at a Lebanese restaurant. It is here, nearby, in Rosetti Square.'

Cezareea indicated she was glad. She rounded in wonder the letter O with her lips beneath the garish lipstick, even though her bowels had only started ruminating on the content of her stomach. She was in no mood for grub.

They didn't speak until they reachd the restaurant. They fell silent, just like two people who are not used to being around each other. They were hiding, in fact, the stench both of them exhaled. It made them look interesting, though, silent as they were, crossing the evening with adult serious faces, or even like adults in love. Or about to fall in love.

The door of the restaurant squeaked like an onion under

cuţitului. Se aşezară cuminţi la masă, ca doi căţei docili, unii de usturoi, lăsându-se în voia amabilităţii false a chelnerului. Îşi dezbrăcară hainele groase, după care începură să se joace cu şerveţelele albastre. Ismail admiră unghiile lăcuite, iar femeia îşi împotmoli privirile în firele de păr, generos izvorând din falangele musulmanului. Semn de virilitate.

Comandară grăbiţi, de parcă nu ar fi mâncat nimic în ziua respectivă. Totul cu cât mai multă ceapă. Şi cu usturoi. Încercând să ascundă gunoiul sub preş. Dialogul începu să se lege ca un aspic condimentat, ce îi purta în adâncul poveştii lor de dragoste. Păsări lovite de glonte, pe jumătate putrezite, se înălţau deasupra capetelor lor grizonate. După care zburară cu greu înspre cinematograf.



the knife blade. They sat down quietly at a table, two docile puppies, two cloves of garlic, enveloped by the waiter's politeness. They took off their thick coats, then they started playing with the blue napkins. Ismail admired her nail varnish, and the girl's eyes got stuck in the hair on his fingers, a generous sign of virility.

They ordered in haste, as if they had eaten nothing all day. Everything with as much onion as possible. And with garlic. Trying to hide the garbage under the rug. And their conversation, so slow at first, became as solid as spicy aspic: it led them into the heart of their love story. Birds shot in the air, half rotten already, soared over their grey heads. After which they flew heavily into the cinema hall.

[Translated into English by Zenovia Popa]



Denisa Comănescu

Anamorfoză

Ceață amanți viteză
cuib de cuc rotitor
l'amante – lamentation
traduceți, vă rog, cuvântul românesc dor.

Cortină atenție vulpe
doi cai verzi pe pereți cât un O
I like Ike
mască perfectă din teatrul Nō.

Un *ce* se zbate să fie
din ceață viteză cortină

Anamorphosis

Fog lovers quickness
a cuckoo's nest spinning in rotation
'l'amante'—'lamentation'
can the Romanian 'dor' mean
'lovesick' in translation?

Curtain attention vixen
pie in the sky—like a big zero
'I like Ike'
a perfect mask for a kabuki show.

Surely *something* is struggling to arise
from fog quickness curtain

cu vulpe atenție amanți
substantivele îşi pun opinci
şi se opintesc
oh îmbrăcălțămintea.

with vixen attention lovers
nouns buckle on their sandals
and give it a go
O footbodywear!

[Translated into English by Adam J. Sorkin]





Contemporary
Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Jennifer Robertson

The Seacoasts of Bessarabia



'Hold you your watch tonight?'

Yes, every night, pistol in black holster, feet in heavy boots, arms swinging against grey serge, gloved hands raised to frozen lips. Breathe hard: 'tis bitter cold, and I am sick at heart...'

The grey walls over which I, Alexandru, keep nocturnal watch, bound no fabled Elsinore. There is no minstrelsy where madness walks.

Which, in shorthand, means I'm a sentry in a madhouse. A thousand drugged Hamlets shuffle around the exercise yard. A thousand Ophelias patch sheets with medicated fingers, no scissors allowed. On each night watch I think of Eli.

She was sixteen when we first met. It was the end of the school year, the start of summer. I bumped into her at the doorway of the house where I lived — an old house with families and single people crammed into every room. Sunlight outlined her legs beneath her summer dress.

'The door's locked...' I warmed to the sound of her voice.

'No problem! I have a key.'

We laughed for no reason at all.

It turned out some elderly relative on the ground floor had taken ill and her mother had asked Eli to call by after school. Oh, Elisabeta, a ministering angel, thou! Yet both of us cursed and damned.

Or am I the damned ghost, condemned to haunt high walls and hear in midnight mist the



sighing of excluded souls, outcast for ever?

Eli and I met all that summer. We walked in the Cişmigiu Gardens and stole kisses half hidden by kindly trees. We caught a suburban train out of town and wandered through the woods. We fed one another with wild strawberries. I loosened Eli's long soft hair.

'My amber girl... Did you know your hair is full of sunshine and amber?'

'Don't say that. Amber is for tears.'

'Golden and warm… The tears of the sun, they say.'

'No tears.' Eli closed my lips. Her fingers were stained with strawberry juice.

'Not even the sun's tears locked in amber?' I persisted.

'No locks,' said Eli.

Summer's end brought call-up papers. Thoughts of Eli somehow got me through daily drill and discipline. Her letters became shorter, though, and then stopped coming, but when my leave came at long last we met in the park as usual. Eli's face was strained. Her eyes seemed haunted. Her hair had lost its sheen.

She told me that her mother had taken ill. The ambulance had not come in time and...

What could I say? 'I'm sorry, Eli…'

'Sorry? You don't mean it. You're the one that put a death wish on us.'

'Wha-at? That's a terrible thing to say! God, I'm shaking all over. You've changed, Eli, something's happened to you.'

'That's a damned bleeding lie! You hate me. I'll kill myself. Yes, I will! I'm a piece of shit. I don't deserve to have a child…'

'A child? You've had a child?'

She giggled.



'Eli, Eli… you sound so weird.'

'Go away!'

'No way! Where's the baby now? If you've really had a baby it's my child too, you know…'

'They've taken her away,' Eli said. Her voice sounded flat and switched off. 'They wanted to take me too, Alexandru. That's why I stopped writing. They've taken my baby, do you hear?' she began to shout. 'I'm going to kill myself, I tell you. Let me go!'

She jumped to her feet. I leapt up. She pushed me away. Filth and abuse poured out of her. Eli, Eli, once so full of summer! Passers-by stared.

I hit her hard across her face. 'Shut up, shut up! They'll call the police. They'll lock you up just like you said!' She spat at me and ran away.

And then I had to go. I was under orders. The new posting was top security, to guard the sea coasts of Bessarabia.

I got leave the following summer. For one day only. I looked for Eli. I tried that relative of hers in the ground floor flat. With much head shaking she advised me to go away but I thrust my foot against the closing door.

'Where can I find Eli?'

The woman pulled at the grubby headscarf that had slipped low over her eyes.

'All right, then. She's in the mad-house if you must know, but you don't want to go there. Anyway, you'll be lucky if they let you in.'

But a military uniform opens many closed doors.

They gave me half an hour. Supervised. A nurse-warder brought Eli into a drab room furnished with nothing except a stool, two wooden chairs and a broken wall clock. The warder sat on one chair. Eli perched on the stool. Her right foot twitched. Her fingers plucked restlessly at her



faded cotton skirt.

'Why have you come? You hate me.'

'No, Eli, no, how can you say such a thing? I love you.'

'Love means nothing here. They guard us like you guard the coasts of Bessarabia.'

'Eli…' I tried to contradict her, but without meaning too I found myself looking at the laddered nylon stocking stuffed with sand that dangled from the warder's belt. I looked away at once, stunned with misery. 'Eli,' I began again, keeping my voice low. 'Don't you remember that summer? The taste of wild strawberries.'

Hatred twisted her face. She half said, half sung in a voice that was not her own:

Then up he rose and donned his clothes
And dropped the chamber door.
Let in the maid, that out a maid never departed more...

'Eli!' My voice faded into silence. Time was ticking away.

As though she had read my thoughts Eli looked up shiftily. 'They watch you all the time. See that big clock. There's a policeman in there. Listen to him going, tick, tick, tick.'

'Eli, that's nonsense. That clock hasn't got a tick. It's not even going. The hands don't move.'

'Don't argue with me! I know what I'm saying. I'm entitled to my own opinion.'

'What about....' I swallowed hard. 'Do you ever hear anything about the baby, Eli?'

Her face went rigid. She put her fingers to her lips and whispered, 'They tell me she's with the living dead.'

'That's terrible…' I reached out and put my hand over hers, but she pulled away.



'You say I hate you, but I truly care for you, Eli. I travelled two nights hard class to get here.'

'You didn't have to come...'

'No, I didn't have to come...'

Shouldn't have come! Why put myself through misery for this poor object whose carapace of madness made a mockery of the girl I had loved? Give up, I told myself. Go back to the rugged coastline we patrolled with machine guns and search lights in case anyone tried to cross our closed border.

Out, not in... It went without saying.

'My Lulu's gone,' Eli said again. She started to cry. 'I love my little Lulu. I looked after her day and night. But they locked me in here. There's no justice in this world.'

The nurse interrupted. 'Rubbish! You can't look after yourself, far less a child. That's why you're in here.' Oh, God…

'Time's up!'

Eli stood, passive now, and dull. I stood up too. My hands dropped helplessly to my side.

She smiled suddenly and, in spite of her pale face and crudest hair-cut, hacked with unkind scissors, I saw again the girl I had loved that summer.

'Thank you for coming. Go with these words, Alexandru. God created the world...'

I shivered. Religious mania. 'Hush, Eli, there's no need.'

'He made a woman and a man...'

The nurse had got to her feet. This was no time for Bible stories.

'No, no, don't go yet,' Eli begged; and suddenly her voice sounded so normal that I could almost believe the whole nightmare was just a bad dream, soon to end.

'Then he made sorrow… Listen, do listen, it's one of our Romanian folk tales. I heard it from



my granny. I'm sure you know it too.'

I nodded. 'Go on then.'

'God couldn't find anywhere to put this sorrow so the man said, 'I will carry it for you.'

She paused. 'That's how it is. Go, Alexandru, carry our sorrow.'

'Oh, Eli...'

'The woman spoke too, you know. She said 'Sorrow shall be my child's bread.' Yes, that's what the woman said.' Eli's voice cracked. 'Our child eats sorrow's bitter bread,' she sobbed and, still sobbing, was led away.

I held out on the shores of Bessarabia for some time longer. Wild and desolate, yes, but the water sang its own language and, less poetically, there was the chance of cheap fags and booze — and women.

But, call it love, call it madness or what you will: I asked for a transfer. So now I guard the top security hospital. Nights only, because on day shift I might catch a glimpse of my summer girl in drabbest pink, walking with other sedated souls that one half hour in the guarded yard.

I prefer to watch over Eli's drugged sleep when the world is dark and the sun sheds no amber tears over her barred, bewildered world.

[Written in English]

Denisa Comănescu

Remember

Când se trezeşte maimuța veselă
a întâmplării
şi vrea să-ți umple viața
cu ore colorate
iute acoperă-ți fața
şi rosteşte un cântec de leagăn.

Remember

When the mirthful monkey of chance
wakes up
and declares her wish to fill your life
with coloured hours
quickly pull something over your face
and start humming a lullaby.

[Translated into English by Ştefan Stoenescu]

JoAnne Growney



The Bear Cave

Twenty-five years ago at Chişcău,
marble quarry workers discovered—
trapped by an earthquake in a wondrous,
enormous cave—bones of one hundred
ninety bears, Ursulus spelaeus
(now extinct). Cold rooms of cathedral
splendour now render tourists breathless
while the insistent drip of water
counts the minutes. There is no safe place

[Written in English]

Contemporary
Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Andrew Fincham

Uncle Dint and the Protochronists



The times when I recall my Uncle Dintenfass, he is usually wreathed in fog.

Sometimes a fog of incomprehension; often one of incredulity; and ever a fog of words. But on the occasion that comes to mind, he sits quietly, almost pensively, beneath a cloud of cigar smoke and a heavily varnished portrait of a dog.

The portrait is in oils; a weighty swag of red plush swings behind a curly brown hound, wearing a perceptibly virtuous expression verging on the smug.

The dog, too, is quiet. Master and mastiff united as if in silent contemplation of what might have been. I got up from the table in some stealth, and had reached the glazed door of the salon before a squeak from the old spring within the handle caused a stir.

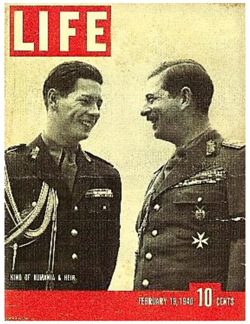
The relative turned, and drilled me with one piecing eye, the second sealed against the smog.

'I'm boring you?'

There never having been an answer to that one, I let it lie.

'Youth has its privileges. Be fly, for I can see the city beckons, and you must not say 'nay'.'

There was, as a matter of fact, no single word of truth in this remark. Starting from the back end, I had no intention of going out: the streets around the little apartment were wreathed in as thick an evening mist



as November Bucharest can make, and it was impossible to see across the square. As for the advantages of age — mine then a little over the middle — they consisted at that point of anticipating the whims of an invalid Uncle who had once again summoned me to his side at short notice to fulfil the duties of nursemaid, housemaid, and *bonne à toute faire*.

The reason, on this occasion, was incapacity in the left knee. The right, he continually stressed, was as good as ever. This had caused some speculation on the utility of two legs, when so very interdependent, and his musings on the advantages of having one as a spare ('built in resilience', he termed it, 'like a fifth wheel') filled most of the morning. My Uncle was so far critical of the uselessness of his remaining functional leg that I was tempted to kick it, but the thought that this would double the time taken to pull on his trousers put me off.

'Belt and braces!' was not, sadly, a maxim of Uncle Dint. Perhaps ironically, his incapacity was a direct result of failing to take adequate precautions walking home after the inaugural meeting of the Budapest Parkour Association. A fellow charging down Mărăcineanu on a toboggan, egged on by a platoon of kids, lost control and careered into a Turkish restaurant. Uncle was *hors de combat* before he was fully aware of what was underway, and on failing to stand upright was carried — almost entirely sober — down Victoriei into the bar of the Hotel Intercontinental thereby reversing the usual common procedure in an instance of life mirroring itself.

On the plus side (he instanced 'forward planning') Uncle Dint had found himself an apartment on the ground floor of a pre-war block equally placed between Dionisie Lupu, Pitar Moş, and Michelet: up a trio of steps through communal doors into darkness and a shuffle to the left saw us home. His front door opened into a parquet hall, which contained the dining table and served as his 'mess', whilst to left and right glazed doors opened onto two further rooms, the first of which housed a bed and a wardrobe and the second an ancient couch. A cubicle towards the rear contained the basics for personal hygiene whilst a curtained space

equipped with sink and an irritable gas stove served as kitchen. Uncle Dint invited me to make myself comfortable.

‘My home is yours, my boy’, he extended lavishly. ‘What’s mine, consider your own’. His hands, ever expressive, encompassed the whole establishment ‘There’s no room for false pride here.’ He was quite right: a reasonably tall man could have touched both walls of that flat simultaneously if he’d chosen to lie down and stretch.



***

We soon fell into a routine. Each morning, the early rumble of the elevator let me know that dawn approached. I inched a wary hand from under the blanket to gauge what it had in store: by the time I could fasten the wrist strap on my watch, the fingers were warm enough to boil a kettle for our morning tea.

The intimacies of getting the relative bathed and dressed may be omitted. Those who have had the experience know, and those who have not should remain in ignorance until the last possible moment.

Inside a week, I had forgotten any other possibility of existence, and I was preparing our modest breakfast when Uncle peered around the corner of the curtain and stopped my hand in the middle of extracting a three-minute egg.

He had a hangdog look. ‘It’s not much of a life,’ he whined. ‘There was a time when these old bones would have hoped for more.’

I had no time for self pity, and let him know in no uncertain terms. ‘Gather thistles, expect prickles’ was my motto, as I stepped past him to lay a tray on the dining table.

‘As it happens, there was a time when I had prepared my plans for pensioneering to perfection.’ I must have looked doubtful. ‘Life is not only on the surface. You have to look behind things. I remember



saying just the same to Professor Bărbulescu back in the '90s, when he lost his pencil sketching a map of the castrum at Turda. 'Look behind the Frigidaire, Mihai', I urged him, 'between there and the drain.' And that's how he came to unearth the *Franziska Tesaurus*. But that's another story.'

I stirred my tea, as meaningfully as I could make a stir.

'But I was about to tell you of the plan that would have retrieved for me a golden retirement. It's a tale of a king, an addiction, and the madness of the Wise Old Man. Would you pass me the salt?'

***

Uncle Dint had one leg straightened upon an inadequate chair of gilt that may have survived a wedding. He scratched at his plaster with a boot-horn and looked down with some suspicion at his egg.

'It all started just after the 1916-19 war, as they call it here. I was managing Gene Tunney, and tried him out with young Georgie Enescu, who I'd heard took silver in Vienna before the war. I'd heard he admired the Ring, but his heart was never in it. We landed the '*Fighting Marine*' a few years later, and I asked George to write him a part as a sailor, but he said he didn't like the sound of it.

I'd an interest in the Victory Games from the Paris YMCA, and was cornered by young Costel Rădulescu, then one of the safest hands in football (he'd badly damaged the other in the battle of Mărăşti). He was trying to get a Pershing pass for a friend named Carol. Always happy to oblige the ladies, I pushed a VIP ticket across, and was surprised when it turned out Carol was heir to the throne and a man to boot. His Royal Highness and I hit it off, and I like to think he got his first love of football from me. Of course, his first love — and his second, third and fourth — were all women. I sometimes wonder if he was overcompensating for having a girl's name? He was adept at keeping several balls in the air — although since his third wife was to the same as his first, perhaps that was not such an own goal as it seemed at the



time.

A few years later, I ran into 'Handy' Costel in the ticket office of F. Laeisz in Hamburg. He was then coaching the national side, and we shared our disbelief in the absurd decision of FIFA to hold the first world cup in Uruguay. HRH was outside, moodily contemplating the absence of European talent over a cold pipe. 'Jobs for the boys, King', I reassured him — he'd renounced his resignation of the throne a few weeks before, although he later changed his mind.

And it was just a few days after that that he promised jobs to the whole team, and they headed to Montevideo. And that's how Romanian football sailed into the history books.'

'You proposed to tell me about your pension plan?' I prompted.

He placed his egg spoon on the saucer with what I considered to be an unnecessary rattle.

'I am. Old King Carol proved an oddball. Remember there's some peculiar blood in that family — not bad, but scarcely blue. After all, Pedro I of Brazil was his great grandfather — paternal, of course — Queen Victoria wouldn't even touch the nuts. Easy to forget.'

'Quite Easy', I reassured him.

'As kings go, Carol was a something of a conservative. A firm fascist, he felt the Iron Guard needed less of the velvet glove. His renaissance was led by chaps who hated absolutely everyone with a vengeance, and the old Ironers let the feminists in.

KC knew I had a Transylvanian heritage (an ancestor once carved a sword for Francis David) and invited me to sniff around in the backwoods to root out the backbone of Dacian history for him to hang his national hat on. We'd started digging, but before we'd got four feet down, the war came round again and he pocked his Garter-belt and shipped off to Pedroville'.

Uncle Dint hitched the leg just below my line of sight as I cleared the table.

'The story moves on.'

I tripped over him. 'I'm very glad. You'll be able to tell it to your Nurse.'

'Nurse?'

'The one I'm about to hire.' And with that I pulled on my coat and stepped out into the morning mist.

***



'I've managed to look out for myself', Uncle Dint was angled on the couch, proudly littered with the debris of half an afternoon's indulgence. Orange peel fought with ash in an overflowing saucer, a chocolate wrapper peeked from under a cushion. And a half-empty decanter stood on the floor next to a glass, both in easy reach.

'Good hunting, I hope?'

'Yours appears to have been successful. I'm glad you're able to get about.' I gave him a hand of encouragement, which appeared to affect him adversely.

'But at a price. I scarcely wish to say. I fear I am slipping back.'

'Do stop when you're able to walk'.

'Walking is nothing. Mankind has been able to walk for fifty thousand years, and look where that has got us!''

There was a time when I paid attention to the relative's remarks, but that was past. 'Bear up: we've a prospective candidate arriving later...' I began.

'Candidate? I don't usually vote...'

'Nurse. So I can leave you, and get on with working for my pension.'

'Back to the old dog eat dog, eh?' Uncle Dint nodded in sympathy. He rummaged in a packet of his cardigan and handed me what looked like the lid of a badly made tobacco pot.



‘My pension plan’, wagged the Uncle’s head sagely, indicating I should look at the reverse, where I found a succession of rather unlikely scratchings.

‘One afternoon’, he began, ‘some fifty years ago…’ I resigned myself to another half century: if Uncle Dint had been a cricketer his figures would have been prodigious. ‘… I had popped back to the diggings to see how young Nici Vlassa was getting on. As I was preparing lunch we had a heated disagreement on the importance of the Diet of Turda, and my thesis which he declared was half-baked. I had just lit the oven when a soiled chap came up to say they’d found some tablets. I quickly checked my pockets to make sure they were not mine (I like to travel with an aspirin), and tuned in the wireless whilst Nici sorted the fellow out.

While Vlassa fell into a brown study, I listened to some well-sprung diva. She’d put in a long innings, and must have been nearing the end of the page when I began to feel peckish and reached out for what appeared to be a selection of biscuits on the stove-top.

Nici started in horror: ‘You’ve cooked the findings!’ he exclaimed, incoherently. I looked down at the tray. The cookies were indeed made of clay. In my defence I protested I had merely listened to the singer, but he was not to be comforted. His beard all but turned white on the spot. ‘The discovery of a lifetime, ruined by some tart aria!’

And the Tartaria tablets they became.

Even so, we knew we’d made a find. Some subsequently said we’d uncovered the oldest script in the world, but that’s now considered out of date. But poor Vlassa could make neither head nor tail of them. No could anyone else. Everyone was left chasing their tail. Everyone, that was, except me. But my ideas were about as welcome as a bocet on the cimpoi.’ He looked rueful. ‘As you can imagine.’

‘I’m imagining.’

‘The ticket to my success, as you’ll no doubt have guessed, was my earlier box office experience from

the inter-allied games. Just take a look at the one in your hand.'

I looked again. 'Is it real?' The relative looked evasive.

'The clay cookies, as I term that Tărtăria find, are three in number. One clearly shows a dog, a duck and a fountain. Some have suggested the duck is a goat, but the thing clearly has only two legs and a duck's arse — which a goat would not have. As for the head — well, try drawing a duck on clay with a stick and see how well you do...

The remaining two both have a hole in. The rectangular one has a small plan, with the symbols of a cup, a shady tree, and a forked stick. In the centre there's a donkey and a firework, and on the right a lavatory pan, with the lid up, but not the seat(1).



This gave me the first clues that we were dealing with a proto-language. But the circular tablet is the dead giveaway. A seated balcony; a starting grid; three bottles on a picnic table and a barbecue grill; and a selection of diversion and direction signs inevitably associated with large events. To make it absolutely clear, the letters '*D DoG* appear underneath the depiction of the running lanes. It couldn't have been easier.

We had found what would now be termed an 'access all areas' pass for a major sporting event. Entitling the wearer to seats, refreshments, facilities — plus parking for the chariot. The strings on which they had been worn had sadly decayed away over the past seven thousand years, otherwise, no doubt, we could have deciphered the major sponsors'.

Uncle Dint smiled with the remembrance of things past. 'With absolutely no backing from the academic establishment, I proceeded to work on my theory. When I discovered that the Slavic word for the Dänischer Hund(2) was 'DOG' the confirmation was, for me complete. I worked on a plan of the race course: from the markings it was clear there were at least two lanes either side a central reservation. A good long run would have been needed to tire the Great Danes. In order to get them to run, I presupposed the duck would be placed in a central canal, or trough, which would enable it to swim ahead of the hounds rather like



a modern electric hare. A vast raised seating area, large amounts of hospitality space and ample parking, all within a safely secured area: all these were clearly visible in the tablets. Everything we thought we'd invented, in point of fact, when organising the games after the war.

I had the whole thing mocked up as a model, and jolly fine it looked too. Of course, at that time it was tricky to get anything done without the say-so of the security wallahs. I was closely watched, as was everybody else. One afternoon, I arrived home to find someone had ransacked the place and my thesis, the model and its plans were gone'. My uncle paused for effect. 'And do you know why?'

'No.'

'The Protochronists'. He saw he had failed to shed light. 'They wouldn't stomach that the Dacian language would use words from the Slavic'[3]. He shook his head. 'My reputation as an international man of science wrecked on the shores of short-sighted self-interest'.

I tried to appear sympathetic. 'No real harm done, I suspect.'

Uncle Dint looked genuinely worried. 'If only that were true' he sighed, 'I think my burden would be lighter.' He shook his head. 'You see, it was after the plans went missing that they started to knock down the city.'

I was incredulous.

'An enormous straight was raised through the middle of town. A great waterway down the centre. The massive pile that is the people's palace was put in place. And all with the most elaborate security. I fear' he stammered 'I fear...'

'Nonsense.', I reassured him.

'You haven't heard the worst.' I tried to doubt it. 'They wanted to prove the races inspired the Olympics. They needed proof that dogs had been running for millennia.'

'How were they supposed to prove that?'



'They needed to find what they fed 'em on: bones, that's what!' Uncle shivered. 'Old Bones. Loads of 'em.'

'And the proof?'

'*Peştera cu Oase*' — the Cave of Bones. The oldest in the world. There's the evidence.' He collapsed with an exhalation of grief.

'Where on earth did you get that idea?'

'I read it in *Noi, Dacii* – by fellow called Dr. Napoleon.'(4)

My jaw sagged. At that moment there was a ring at the door. A very pretty woman in a starched white apron and hat stood beside an empty wheelchair.

'Mr Dintenfass? I've come to take you away.'

I forgot to ask her when she was coming back.

Every dog has his day.

(1) Some have argued this suggests a Ladies' facility. Arguments that the further marks (three) tally the usage of the amenity are not broadly supported [Ed].

(2) *Canis lupus familiaris*

(3) Extant Protochronic correspondence examined subsequent to 1989 may imply the tablet concerned was intended for a foreign (Slavic?) dignitary. [Ed]

(4) As of 2011 no sign of such an article has yet been found

[Written in English]

Grete Tartler

La hipodrom

Sprijinită de balustrada de fier tânăra soție
vede camioanele care descarcă la abator
şiruri de vite. O limbă roşie descoperă, la răsărit,
colții oraşului.
Ah, acuma, că s-au mutat
În sfârşit într-o casă nouă, de-ar fi
lângă bloc un verde, curat hipodrom,
de-ar fi mutat abatorul, să poată dormi!
Îşi va invita prietenii în balcon
să privească petrecerea hippică,
vor aplauda, vor petrece!
Şi nu va mai trebui să-şi pună perna pe cap
sau să dea casetofonul la maximum
spre a preface mugetul zilei care-a trecut

At the Racecourse

Leaning on the iron railing, the young wife
sees lorries at the abattoir unloading
files of cattle. A tongue of red, to the east,
uncovers the jagged teeth of the city.
Ah, now that they've finally moved
to a new flat, if only they could have
next to their block a clean, green racecourse!
If the abattoir could be moved; if she could sleep!
She could invite her friends on to the balcony
to watch the races; they'd clap, they'd enjoy it.
And she'd no longer have to wedge
a pillow around her head, or turn
her cassette-player up to its maximum volume
to reduce the day's bellowing

într-un horcăit suportabil.

to a tolerable rattle in the throat.

[Translated into English by Fleur Adcock]



Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Constantin Preda

Iarnă la Sadova

vin vechi cu camfor mult şi scorţişoară
sub streşini mici ca-n „fraţii văcăreşti" la ţară

vin fiert cu miezuri mici de nucă
şi-un călător înzăpezit ce-n poezia mea apucă

ţăranii dând gură la lupi
din colbul strâns pe timpul verii-n stupi

totu-i ceresc doar un lătrat de câini
vii mai spre foc cu biblia în mâini

zâmbeşti discret mai spui câte-o trăsnaie

Sadová Winter

A vintage mulled with cinnamon and camphor, beneath
These country eaves the Vacaresti Brothers might have planned.

The burning wine. The nuts cracked open.
The snow-flecked traveller blown indoors to this poem.

Wolf and peasant locked in an embrace
Raise dust which gilded summer's beehive floors.

The barking dogs disturb our otherworld of silence
So hug the fire and take the holy book in hand.

Your smile gives voice to soulful indiscretions

pentru tablourile din odaie

vin fiert cu camfor mult şi scorţişoară
sub streşini mici la sadova la ţară

iubita mea cu sânii mari cât nuca
o să-mi dărâmi căţuia asta, bojdeuca

Till pictures on the walls begin to share the scene.

A vintage mulled with cinnamon and camphor, beneath
These Văcăresti eaves scaled down to Sadova.

Your walnut heart fills out my nutshell world
So please don't snuff the flicker of this scented flame.

[Translated into English by Philip Orr]





Contemporary
Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Bogdan Suceavă

O călătorie în jurul lumii

În anii aceia, când războiul trecuse demult, iar oamenii din satul Valea Rea crezuseră că au auzit şi văzut totul, singura ştire care ar mai fi putut să şocheze a ajuns în sat în seara de marți care a urmat furtunii. Era pe vremea când poporul sovietic eliberator trimesese în spațiu Sputnikul, iar la Valea Rea ajunseseră cele mai stranii invenții de care bunici mei auziseră vreodată: radioul, curentul electric şi campania de alfabetizare. Nenorocirea din seara aceea s-a întâmplat din vina unchiului meu, cunoscut încă de pe atunci cu numele de nea Gigi, care a observat, la fel ca toată lumea din sat, că s-a oprit curentul electric. Era prima oară de când se instalase linia de înaltă tensiune. La Valea Rea exista de multă vreme o solidă tradiție de contemplare pasivă a faptelor, urmată de o decisivă inacțiune. Nea Gigi era însă făcut dintr-o altă plămadă. A socotit repede că până ce un

A Journey around the World

In those years, long after the war, when the folk of Evil Vale thought they had heard and seen everything, the only tidings that were still able to shock reached the village on the evening of the Tuesday after the storm. It was back when the liberating Soviet people sent Sputnik up into space, and in Evil Vale arrived the strangest inventions of which my grandparents had never heard: radio, electricity, and the literacy campaign. The unfortunate incident of that evening came about because of my uncle, known even then by the name of Gaffer Gigi, who, like all the other folk in the village, had observed that the electrical current had been cut off. This was the first time this had happened since the power lines had been installed. In Evil Vale there had long been a vigorous tradition of contemplating any untoward event passively, followed by decisive inaction. Gaffer Gigi,

electrician va ajunge la Valea Rea, trimis de regionala care asigura întreținerea rețelei electrice, ar trece cel puțin vreo două zile, răstimp în care satul ar sta fără curent. Atunci a luat hotărârea eroică să-şi arunce pe umăr funia pe care o folosea la legarea coarnelor vacilor şi să urce pe deal, acolo unde se aflau stâlpii magistralei naționale de înaltă tensiune. Era hotărât să se cațăre el pe stâlpul vinovat şi să remedieze defecțiunea. Nu se pricepea deloc la instalații electrice, dar cât de complicat ar fi putut să fie?

Nu era prima oară când nea Gigi încerca să salveze planeta. Când a ajuns lângă stâlpul de înaltă tensiune şi-a făcut toate socotelile şi a ajuns la concluzia că-l va escalada folosind o tehnică alpină care-i mai fusese utilă şi în calitatea lui de fost vânător de munte, în unitatea specială de cercetaşi care luase parte la bătălia de la Banska Bistrica. Întrucât nimeni nu a văzut scena care avea să urmeze şi întrucât el nu avea să-şi amintească niciodată prea bine ce s-a întâmplat, zvonurile şi opiniile sunt împărțite. Unii spun că s-ar fi urcat până sus pe stâlp şi că acolo a pus mâna pe un bec. Alții spun că defecțiunea rețelei electrice nu se datora furtunii din seara precedentă, ci că era o hibă mai veche, mai precis că un fir se încolăcise pe stâlp, purtând în el o uriaşă tensiune. Alt zvon spunea că stâlpul era oricum ud, iar nea Gigi ar fi fost pe

however, was cut from different cloth. He swiftly reckoned up that at least two days would pass before an electrician, sent by the regional board that oversaw maintenance of the network, could reach Evil Vale, during which interval the village would be left without electricity. He was determined to clamber up the offending pylon and remedy the defect. He knew nothing at all about electrical installations, but how complicated could it be?

It was not the first time Gaffer Gigi had tried to save the planet. When he arrived at the electricity pylon, he made a thorough reckoning and came to the conclusion that he would have to scale it using an alpine technique which had previously come in handy when he was a mountain hunter in the special scout unit that had taken part in the Battle of Banska Bistrica. Inasmuch as no one saw the scene that was to follow and inasmuch as he was never able to recall very well what happened, the rumours and opinions are divided. Some say that he must have climbed to the top of the pylon and touched a conductor. Others say that the defect in the electrical network wasn't due to the storm of the previous evening, but rather it was an older flaw, to be exact a cable had coiled around the pylon, carrying a high voltage.

jumătate beat. Singurul lucru cert e că a rezultat o niagară de scântei şi pocnete, din care s-a ridicat un vârtej de fum violet, care mirosea precum diavolul. Trebuie că nea Gigi a pus mâna pe o porţiune neizolată a cablului de înaltă tensiune şi de acolo trupul i-a zburat prin coroana stejarului din apropiere, peste căpiţele de fân, peste prunii bătrâni şi harnici, tulburând cuiburile privighetorilor şi speriind sitarii, şi a aterizat pe coasta dealului sub un unghi lin, similar cu cel al avioanelor sosind asupra pistei. S-a oprit din rostogolire pe spate, cu mâinile deschise larg, în poziţia omului ideal din gravura lui Leonardo da Vinci. Miracolul e că nu şi-a fracturat decât o coastă, iar din uriaşul şoc electric şi-a pierdut două degete. De atunci a rămas pentru totdeauna cu un aer straniu dublat de porecla neobişnuită chiar şi pentru satul Valea Rea; i s-a spus nea Gigi O-Mie-de-Volţi.

Uite-aşa avea el să trăiască nouăzeci de ani şi avea să povestească în momente neaşteptate tot felul de ciudăţenii pe care ajunseseră să le ştie toţi copiii din sat. Pentru că, după ce lumea s-a liniştit, rareori l-ai mai fi văzut ieşind din curtea lui. Dacă voiai să auzi o năzdrăvănie, trebuia să te duci să-l

Another rumour said that the pole was wet, and that Gaffer Gigi was half-drunk. The only thing certain is that a cascade of loudly crackling sparks resulted, raising a whirlwind of violet smoke, which smelled like the Devil. Gaffer Gigi must have put his hand on a non-isolated portion of the high-voltage cable, and thence his body was hurled through the crown of the nearby oak tree, over the hay cocks, over the old and industrious plum trees, disturbing the nightingales' nests and frightening the woodcocks, before landing on the side of the hill at a gentle sloping angle, similar to that of aeroplanes touching down on a runway. He rolled downhill and came to a stop on his back, with his arms spread wide, in the same position as the ideal man in Leonardo da Vinci's drawing. The miracle is that he fractured only one rib, but from the huge electrical shock he had lost two fingers. Since then, he has always had a strange air, combined with a nickname unusual even for the village of Evil Vale; they called him Gaffer Gigi Thousand-Volts.

And so, he lived to the age of ninety and at unexpected moments he would tell of all kinds of strange things, which all the children in the village came to know. For, after all the excitement died down, it was rarely that you would see him emerge from his own yard. If you wanted to

asculţi. Petrecea zile în şir fumând, bând cafea ieftină sau ceai de tei, uitându-se la cer, trecându-şi mâna prin barba nerasă de trei zile. Spunea că a văzut lumea şi că nu mai are nimic nou de văzut. Avea teoriile lui, toate dublate de o certitudine simplificatoare şi înrădăcinate într-o experienţă de viaţă care l-ar fi traumatizat pe orice alt muritor.

Mulţi ani mai târziu, într-una dintre acele zile când ne jucam pe malul râului, am auzit următoarea legendă, pe care mi-a povestit-o un alt copil. Mai exagerează copiii, mai cu seamă la vârsta aceea, dar prietenul meu pretindea că auzise o baladă pe o muzică veselă despre acest subiect incredibil. Se spunea că o zână a muntelui s-a îndrăgostit de un erou din război. Şi îl iubea cum niciodată o zână nu a iubit un muritor, pentru că era frumos ca o creastă de munte peste care trec razele amurgului, înalt, şi blond, cu ochi albaştri şi subţire. Legenda spunea că zâna dorea să-i devină soţie. Şi ea era frumoasă ca steaua ce însoţeşte luna şi-şi putea schimba chipul după cum bărbatul care o visa îşi schimba dorinţa, adică putea fi blondă sau brună, înaltă sau scundă, pururea tânără şi frumoasă, ca orice făptură a adâncurilor. Dar voinicul a spus nu. El a spus nu şi nu, pentru că nu vroia să

hear some marvel, you had to go there and listen to him. He would spend days on end smoking, drinking cheap coffee or linden tea, gazing at the sky, running his fingers over his three-day growth of stubble. He used to say that he had seen the world, and that there was nothing new for him to see. He had his theories, all combined with a simplifying certitude and rooted in a life's experience that would have traumatized any other mortal.

Many years later, on one of those days when we used to play on the riverbank, I heard the following legend, which one of the other children told me. Children tend to exaggerate, especially at that age, but my friend claimed to have heard a ballad set to merry music about that unbelievable subject. He said that a mountain fairy had fallen in love with a war hero. And she loved him as no other fairy has loved any mortal before, because he was as handsome as a mountain crest in the rays of the setting sun, tall and blond, blue-eyed and slim. Legend told that the fairy wished to become his wife. And she was as beautiful as the star that accompanies the moon, and she could alter her visage according to how the man who dreamed her altered his desire, which is to say blonde or brunette, tall or short, eternally young and beautiful, like any creature of the deep.

o ia pe ea, ci dorea o anume fată din sat, o fată pe care o ştia el din copilărie. Atunci, zâna pădurii, cuprinsă de o criză furibundă de gelozie, a aranjat lucrurile în aşa fel încât a trimis spre el zece mii de volţi. Eroul din baladă a murit cu degetele strânse în jurul unei şuviţe de păr castaniu pe care i-o dăruise fata din sat.

Asta era legenda pe care eu am auzit-o pe malul râului. Uite din pricina asta nu poţi să pui nicio bază pe istoriile de la Valea Rea. Cum au trecut câţiva ani, cum realitatea începe să se imerseze într-un ocean de înflorituri halucinante şi faptele de altădată capătă o dimensiune supranaturală. Un lucru e sigur: nea Gigi şi-a pierdut două degete şi asta a avut de-a face cu electricitatea. În plus, el nu era înalt şi blond, şi nu avea ochii albaştri, ci era mărunţel şi măsliniu, cu părul negru, înainte de a-i fi încărunţit pe jumătate.

Clipa de glorie a lui nea Gigi fusese în mai 1945, atunci când a fost ales să participe ca purtător de drapel, reprezentând unitatea lui de vânători de munte, la parada victoriei de la Praga. Misiunea lui a fost aceea de a duce pe umăr steagul, un drapel înalt, roşu, galben şi albastru, cu emblema unităţii militare şi a coroanei României, aşezat într-

But the hero flatly said no, because he did not wish to marry her, but rather he desired a certain girl from the village, a girl he had known since childhood. Then, the fairy of the forest, overcome by a fit of jealous fury, arranged things in such a way that the hero got a ten-thousand-volt electric shock. The hero of the ballad died with his fingers clenching a lock of chestnut hair given to him by the girl in the village.

That was the legend I heard on the riverbank. That's why you can't lend any credence to the tales from Evil Vale. As the years go by, the reality becomes immersed in an ocean of fantastic embellishments and the events of former times acquire a supernatural dimension. One thing is certain: Gaffer Gigi lost two fingers and this had something to do with electricity. Moreover, he wasn't tall and blond, and he didn't have blue eyes, but rather he was short and swarthy, and he had black hair, before half of it turned white.

Gaffer Gigi's moment of glory had been in May 1945, when he was chosen from his unit of mountain hunters to be the flag-bearer at the victory parade in Prague. His mission had been to carry on his shoulder the flag, a long red, yellow and blue banner, with the emblem of the military unit and the Romanian Crown, included in a long line of Soviet battle flags scheduled to file past on horseback at an emotional

un lung şir de drapele sovietice de luptă, destinate să defileze împreună călare într-un moment emoţionant care preceda restul parăzii. De la el am auzit eu prima oară despre cel de-al doilea război mondial, înainte să văd filme cu eroi, tancuri, aviaţie şi John Wayne pe jeep. Fotografiile de arhivă cu nea Gigi au rămas, aşa că partea asta a poveştii nu mai e legendă, ca aia cu zâna munţilor. În imaginile alb-negru decolorate şi trecute de multă vreme în culoare sepia, se poate vedea nea Gigi tânăr, frumos ca un înger, părând înalt pentru că se ţinea mândru, brunet şi cu o privire intensă, învingătorul indiscutabil al unui război pe care-l începuse în cealaltă tabără, ca toată armata română de altfel, după cum bine se ştie. Adevărul e că nea Gigi luase parte la îngrozitoarea bătălie de la Odessa, apoi la cea de la Sevastopol, apoi la cea de la Iaşi, apoi la cea de la Banska Bistrica, şi scăpase cu viaţă din tot acest carnagiu, pentru a-şi pierde două degete pe dealul copilăriei sale, după război, atunci când a descoperit experimental forţa electricităţii.

Poveştile pe care le spunea el erau totdeauna parţiale, şi asta din pricina timpurilor verbale, care după accidentul electric nu s-au mai aflat niciodată în acord. Uneori îi lipsea predicatul, altă dată numai subiectul, iar altădată nu se mai

moment preceding the parade proper. It was from him that I first heard of the Second World War, before ever seeing films with heroes, tanks, planes, and John Wayne on a jeep. The archive photographs of Gaffer Gigi have been preserved, and so this part of the story is not legend, unlike the part with the fairy of the mountains. In the black-and-white images, long since faded to sepia, the young Gaffer Gigi can be seen, as handsome as an angel, seemingly tall because he bore himself proudly, brown-haired and with intense eyes, the indisputable victor of a war which he had begun on the other side, like the whole of the Romanian Army in fact, as is well known. The truth is that Gaffer Gigi had taken part in the terrifying battle at Odessa, then the one at Sevastopol, then the one at Jassy, then the one at Banska Bistrica, and he had escaped all that carnage with his life, only to lose two fingers on the hillside of his childhood, after the war, when he had discovered through his own experience the power of electricity.

The stories he used to tell were always partial, and this was because of the verb tenses, which after the electric shock, were never in agreement. Sometimes the predicate would be missing, sometimes only the subject, and

înțelegea deloc ce spune.

Una dintre poveşti era de pe vremea războiului, de la Odessa. Atunci când armata română a ajuns acolo, în anul 1941, pentru oraş s-a dat o bătălie cumplită. Nea Gigi se afla într-un tranşeu lângă care a căzut o bombă, şi suflul exploziei l-a acoperit de pământ. L-au dezgropat nişte soldați care apucaseră să vadă scena. Câteva ceasuri mai târziu, într-o bătălie care a avut loc între zidurile unor foste case, măturate vreme de zile bune de un baraj de artilerie, nea Gigi a rămas singur, pentru că cei de lângă el au fost împuşcați. Singur şi cu foarte puțină muniție, a fost luat prizonier de un grup de soldați ai Armatei Roşii. Pentru că bătălia continua şi nimeni nu avea timp să se ocupe de prizonier, a fost legat cu două funii şi uitat între cărămizi sparte şi cioburi, vreme de o jumătate de oră, răstimp în care toată bătălia a reînceput cu şi mai mare furie. Cei care voiau să-l ducă în spatele frontului au fost angajați în interminabile schimburi de focuri. În jurul lui cădeau schijele şi gloanțele. S-a strâns cu genunchii la gură şi a închis ochii. Dintr-o clipă într-alta aştepta să fie tăiat de un proiectil. Dar a ieşit altfel: nea Gigi a fost eliberat tot de plutonul lui, care a dat peste el din întâmplare. Locotenentul lui l-a găsit printre cărămizi, acoperit cu moloz, cu mâinile

sometimes it wasn't at all possible to understand what he was saying.

One of the stories was from the time of the war, from Odessa. When the Romanian Army reached there in 1941, there had been a fierce battle for the city. Gaffer Gigi was in a trench next to which a bomb fell, and the blast of the explosion covered him in earth. He was dug out by some soldiers who had seen what had happened. A few hours later, in a battle that took place amid the walls of what had once been a building, levelled days previously by an artillery barrage, Gaffer Gigi had found himself on his own, because those alongside him had all been shot. Alone and with very little ammunition, Gaffer Gigi was taken prisoner by a group of Red Army soldiers. Because the battle was still underway and no one had time to bother about a prisoner, they tied him up with two ropes and forgot about him among the shattered bricks and broken glass, for half an hour, during which time the battle recommenced with even greater fury. The ones who had wanted to take him away behind the front line were caught up in interminable exchanges of fire. Shrapnel and bullets were falling around him. He buried his head in his knees and closed his eyes. He was expecting to be cut down by a projectile at any moment. But things turned

legate şi ochii strălucind de febră, şoc şi lipsă de oxigen, în atmosfera saturată de praf. L-au dezlegat şi i-au dat arma unui camarad căzut, după care a ajuns din nou în linia întâi, la câteva ore distanţă de momentul când pusese cruce la tot şi credea că va merge în prizonierat. Când ne-a spus nouă povestea a avut grijă să adauge că nu a avut timp să-i fie frică. Frica, zicea el, spre a-ţi intra în oase, are nevoie de timp. Pentru că frica nu e şocul din primele clipe, acea groază intensă sub presiunea căreia acţionezi, ci otrava constantă care se aşează la baza fiecărui gest şi te transformă în cârpă. Frica e un nămol care-ţi intră în sânge şi te face să respiri amar.

Câteva zile mai târziu, povestea nea Gigi copiilor, locotenentul care l-a scăpat din scurtul lui prizonierat a plecat să ducă o mapă de acte în clădirea comandamentului românesc din Odessa. De cum a intrat el în clădire, s-a auzit explozia. E vorba de explozia aceea celebră, în urma ei au fost executaţi ostateci şi au avut loc tot felul de tragedii în oraş. Odessa fusese ocupată de germani şi români, iar unitatea de cercetaşi a lui nea Gigi fusese încartiruită într-un garaj.

out differently: Gaffer Gigi was freed by his own platoon, which came upon him by chance. His lieutenant found him among the bricks, covered in rubble, his hands bound and his eyes gleaming with fever, from the shock and depleted oxygen of the dust-saturated air. They untied him and gave him a fallen comrade's rifle, after which he ended up on the front line once more, a few hours after he had given everything up as lost and resigned himself to being a prisoner. When he told us the tale he took care to add that he had not had time to be afraid. Fear, he said, takes time to seep into your bones. Because fear isn't the shock of the first moments, that intense terror under whose pressure you still act, but rather the continual poison that accumulates beneath every gesture and turns you into a limp rag. Fear is the mire that gets into your blood and makes you breathe painfully.

A few days later, Gaffer Gigi told the children, the lieutenant who had rescued him from his brief captivity went out to take a sheaf of documents to the commandant's building in Odessa. As soon as he entered the building an explosion was heard. It was that famous explosion, as a result of which hostages were executed and all kinds of atrocities took place in the city. Odessa had been occupied by Germans and Romanians, and Gaffer Gigi's unit of scouts

Comandamentul, se spunea, fusese minat de un comando sovietic. În clipa exploziei nea Gigi se aflase în garajul din apropiere şi se pregătea să stea la coadă pentru un prânz tardiv, când explozia l-a trântit la pământ şi a răsturnat cazanul cu supă. Nea Gigi ne-a povestit că urechile au început să-i ţiuie, pentru că zgomotul fusese apocaliptic. A început să se bată peste urechi, ca şi cum ar fi vrut să uşureze presiunea, şi nu a auzit nici bătălia de aviaţie care se desfăşura în depărtări, nici strigătele răniţilor, nici eforturile sanitarilor. Vreme de mai multe zile nu a auzit nimic.

A doua oară când era să cadă prizonier a fost la finalul bătăliei Crimeei, atunci când trupele germane şi române s-au retras. Asta era mult mai târziu, pe vremea umilinţei şi a înfrângerii, şi când povestea despre asta ochii lui deveneau gri, nesiguri, crispaţi, ca şi cum ar fi văzut îndeaproape moartea. Dintr-o întreagă unitate, numai nea Gigi a izbutit să scape, în nişte condiţii de confuzie şi panică pe care niciodată nu le-a putut nara fără un oarecare tremur al mâinii. În orice caz, a izbutit să ne povestească fuga şi groaza care a însoţit-o, şi faptul că a fost împins cu patul puştii de pe spatele unui camion de un soldat german care i-a strigat că din pricina ţiganilor lui Antonescu s-a pierdut bătălia. Ce dobitoc, nu uita să adauge nea Gigi, răsucind ţigara, nu

had been billeted in a garage. The commandant, it was said, had been mined by a Soviet commando. At the moment of the explosion, Gaffer Gigi was in the nearby garage preparing to queue up for a late lunch. The explosion threw him to the ground and overturned the cauldron of soup. Gaffer Gigi told us that his ears began to ring, for the din had been apocalyptic. He started slapping his ears, as if to release the pressure, and he didn't hear the aviation battle unfolding in the distance, or the cries of the wounded, or the exertions of the medics. For very many days he heard nothing.

The second time was when he was about to be taken prisoner in the final battle for the Crimea, when the German and Romanian troops retreated. That was much later, during humiliation and defeat, and when he told the tale his eyes would become grey, uncertain, puckered up, as though he could descry death close at hand. Of the entire unit, only Gaffer Gigi managed to survive, in conditions of confusion and panic which he was never able to narrate without a certain tremor of the hand. In any case, he managed to tell us the tale of his flight and the horror that accompanied it, and the fact that a German soldier knocked him off the back of a truck with his rifle butt and shouted at him that it was because of Antonescu's gypsies that they had lost the battle.

înainte de a consemna faptul că neîndoielnic ar mai fi fost loc în camion. În toată acea nebunie care era războiul, nea Gigi nu-şi propusese nimic altceva decât să scape cu viaţă şi, dacă se poate, întreg. Asta era dorinţa care-i dădea tăria să fugă dintr-o suflare kilometri întregi, să reziste la frig, foame, sete, umilinţă şi pericole continue. Până la urmă s-a îmbarcat pe ultima fregată care părăsea portul cu destinaţia Constanţa, şi dus a fost din Crimeea, unde nu plănuia să mai revină vreodată. Ne povestea că aceea a fost singura lui călătorie pe mare şi că şi-a petrecut cea mai mare parte a vremii stând pe puntea arhiplină, uitându-se înapoi să vadă dacă îi ajung ruşii. Povestea că apele Mării Negre sunt întunecate şi nesigure, că marinarii spuneau că oricând un submarin sovietic i-ar fi putut torpila.

Despre Crimeea, ne povestea că are cele mai frumoase veri dintre pământ şi stele, un cer înalt, curat, pe care Calea Laptelui se vede întreagă, un aer pur şi marin, atunci când nu miroase a praf de puşcă. Ne povestea despre un orizont larg şi atoate cuprinzător, rarefiat de profilele unor tumuli misterioşi, întunecaţi.

What a blockhead, Gaffer Gigi would never omit to add, rolling a cigarette, not before noting the fact that without a doubt there would have been enough room for him on that truck. In the madness of war, all that Gaffer Gigi had set out to do was to escape with his life and, if possible, in one piece. That was the wish that gave him the strength to run for miles without pausing for breath, to endure cold, hunger, thirst, humiliation and continual danger. In the end, he had boarded the last frigate leaving the port, which was bound for Constanţa, and thus was he borne from the Crimea, whither he never planned to return. He would tell us that that was his only voyage by sea and that he had spent much of the time standing on the overcrowded deck, forgetting to look back to see whether the Russians were catching up. He would tell of how the waters of the Black Sea were murky and perilous, of how the sailors said that a Soviet submarine could have torpedoed them at any moment.

As for the Crimea, he would tell us that it had the most beautiful summers between earth and the stars, a lofty, clean sky, against which the whole of the Milky Way could be seen, a pure marine air, when it didn't reek of gunpowder. He would tell us about a wide and all-encompassing horizon, broken by the outlines of mysterious, dark tumuli.

Adevărul e că în afară de aventurile lui din vremea războiului, nea Gigi nu a mai călătorit niciodată. Pentru el, imaginea lumii rămăsese fixată în acel vălmăşag de sânge şi durere din anii patruzeci, ceea ce nu-l împiedica să spună că a umblat în jurul pământului. Cum adică în jurul pământului? îl întrebam noi, copiii. Păi parcă ziceai că n-ai fost decât până în Crimeea, şi apoi până la Praga. El ridica din umeri şi spunea: mai departe de atât nu se poate, dacă te-ai născut la Valea Rea. Unde voiai să mă duc? Şi apoi zicea: nu mai e lumea ce a fost. Rusia de atunci nu e ca Rusia de acum, şi nici România de atunci nu mai e ca cea de acum. Asta era atunci. Gata.

Nea Gigi nu avea o opinie personală despre faptul că armata română a luptat vreme de trei ani împotriva Armatei Roşii şi că după aceea a întors armele şi a luptat alături de Armata Roşie împotriva Wermachtului. Chestiunile acestea îl depăşeau, nu considera că sunt problema unui simplu soldat lăsat la vatră în 1945. Obişnuia să spună despre armata română din anii optzeci e echipată precum trupele de elită din anii patruzeci, pentru importantul motiv că în zilele noastre fiecare soldat are amândoi bocancii de aceeaşi

The truth is that apart from his adventures during the war, Gaffer Gigi never travelled. For him, the image of the world had remained fixed in that welter of blood and pain in the 1940s, which did not prevent him from saying that he had been all around the world. ‘How’s that, all around the word?’ we children would ask him. ‘Didn’t you say that you’d only ever been to the Crimea, and then to Prague?’ He would shrug and say: ‘You can’t get further afield than that, if you were born in Evil Vale. Where would you have wanted me to go?’ And then he would say: ‘The world’s no longer what it used to be. The Russia of those days isn’t the Russia of nowadays, and nor the Romania of those days the Romania of nowadays. That was what it was like back then. That’s all.’

Gaffer Gigi had no personal opinion about the fact that the Romanian Army had fought for three years against the Red Army and then turned its guns and fought the Wehrmacht alongside the Red Army. These were matters beyond him; he didn’t consider them matters for a simple soldier, discharged in 1945. He was in the habit of saying that the Romanian Army of the 1980s was equipped like the elite troops of the 1940s, for the important reason that nowadays every soldier has two boots of the same size. He told me that

măsură. Mi-a povestit că unul dintre secretele supraviețuirii pe drumul spre Berlin era să găseşti de la un soldat german mort doi bocanci întregi care să fi avut aceeaşi măsură ca şi tine. Dacă găseai bocanci, erai salvat. Nea Gigi nu era înalt, dar se născuse cu nişte tălpi gigantice, late şi impresionante, care trebuie că i-au dat multă bătaie de cap, cel puțin în perioada care a precedat tragicele vremuri din primăvara lui 1945, când se găseau uşor încălțări, pentru că erau multe cadavre. Iarna dintre 1944 şi 1945 l-a învățat ce înseamnă frigul, un frig criminal, oribil, care a afectat multe trupuri.

Atunci, în bătălia pentru Budapesta, i s-a întâmplat de s-a înfipt o schijă în cască, fără a-l atinge în vreun fel. A rămas cu casca aceea vreme de câteva zile, până ce noul lui locotenent i-a ordonat să o schimbe cu alta, fără fisuri. Era la fel de uşor să găseşti şi căşti, erau pe toate drumurile.

Ştii câți locotenenți am schimbat în timpul războiului? mă întreba el, scuipând în palme, în timp ce despica lemne cu toporul în curtea din spatele casei lui. Opt! Şi spunea asta cu aerul învingătorilor, pentru că marile carnagii nu cunosc alți învingători decât supraviețuitorii. Opt locotenenți, domnule!

Şi mai spunea: am scăpat de trei ori din unități militare

one of the secrets of surviving on the road to Berlin was to find on a dead German soldier a pair of intact boots that were the right size. If you found boots, you were saved. Gaffer Gigi wasn't tall, but he had been born with gigantic, broad-soled, impressive feet, which must have caused him a great deal of trouble, at least in the period up to the tragic events of spring 1945, when footwear was easy to find, because there were so many corpses. In the winter between 1944 and 1945 he learned the meaning of cold, a murderous, dreadful cold, which affected many bodies.

Then, in the battle for Budapest, a flying piece of shrapnel happened to lodge in his helmet, without scathing him in any way. He went on wearing the same helmet for a few days, until his new lieutenant ordered him to change it for one that wasn't cracked. It was just as easy to find helmets. They were all over the roads.

'Do you know how many lieutenants I had during the war?' he asked me, spitting into his palms, as he split wood with the axe in the yard behind his house. 'Eight!' And he would say this with a triumphant air, because great slaughters know no other victors than the survivors. 'Eight lieutenants, mister!'

And he would also say: 'I changed military units

care au fost distruse. Ştii tu ce înseamnă o unitate distrusă? E ca şi cum ar pleca de aici pe coasta asta de munte în sus două sute de oameni, şi la sfârşitul zilei mai ar mai fi în picioare vreo zece.

Stătea pe o buturugă curbată şi fuma ţigări fără filtru. Văzuse lumea, şi acum şi-o reamintea şi nu voia să mai călătorească. Îi plăceau şi lui filmele cu John Wayne, ca şi mie, dar când ajungea la scenele de bătălie spunea: căcat! De fapt a fost mult mai urât decât arată ăştia aici. Când îl întrebam cum adică mai urât ridica din umeri, ca şi cum n-ar fi ştiut cum să povestească.

A nu se înţelege că nea Gigi era un laş. Dimpotrivă, a luat parte la bătălii şi s-a întâmplat ca soarta să-l arunce acolo unde era confruntarea mai mare. În munţii Tatra, de pildă, a primit ordin ca împreună cu un alt soldat să arunce în aer un cuib de mitralieră de pe un versant montan. S-au strecurat cu cea mai mare grijă până la o oarecare distanţă de cuibul de mitralieră, şi acolo, între tufişuri şi resturi de copaci carbonizaţi de bombarbamente, au dat nas în nas cu doi soldaţi ruşi care fuseseră trimişi de căpitanul lor ca să arunce în aer acelaşi cuib de mitralieră. Au schimbat priviri. A urmat un moment de tăcere. Nemişcaţi, s-au uitat lung unii la alţii

three times, after they were destroyed. Do you know what it means for a unit to be destroyed? It's as though you went up that mountain there with a hundred men, and at the end of the day there would be only ten left standing.'

He would sit on a log and smoke cigarettes without filters. He had seen the world, and now he was remembering it all. And he didn't want to travel any more. He liked John Wayne films too, the same as I did, but when he got to the battle scenes, he would say: 'Shit! In fact it was much uglier than this lot here portray it.' When I asked him how it was uglier, he would shrug, as though he didn't know how to tell the tale.

Let it not be understood that Gaffer Gigi was a coward. On the contrary, he took part in many battles and it happened that fate cast him into the thick of the heaviest fighting. In the Tatra Mountains, for example, he and another soldier were ordered to blow up a machine-gun nest on a mountain slope. They crept with the greatest of care until they reached a certain distance from the machine-gun nest, and there, among the bushes and the remains of trees carbonized by the bombardment, they came face to face with two Russian soldiers who had been sent by their captain to blow up the same machine-gun nest. They exchanged

şi unul dintre ruşi le-a arătat grenada, şi apoi cazemata de beton de pe versant. Totul în cea mai mare tăcere, sub nişte grămezi de crengi arse. Nea Gigi nu ştia rusă, şi nu ştia nicio altă limbă decât româna, dar aici era uşor de înţeles: erau împreună în aceeaşi situaţie. Era clar că niciunul dintre cei patru nu-şi dorea să fie pe coasta aceea rece şi umedă, iar oamenii care iubesc viaţa n-ar merita duşi la război. Au înaintat încă zece metri împreună, în sus, pe coastă, ridicându-se pe umeri unul pe celălalt, trăgându-se şi susţinându-se, într-un fel de şir indian târându-se spre pisc, pe solul acoperit de reziduuri de vegetaţie, ei patru, ca un şarpe compus din trupuri omeneşti. La un moment dat, capul şarpelui s-a ridicat cam o jumătate de metru şi a scuipat grenada. A urmat explozia, aproape. După aceea s-a făcut linişte, mitraliera ucigaşă s-a oprit, şi nea Gigi a mai scăpat încă o dată cu viaţă şi întreg.

Când s-a terminat războiul, după ce a participat la parada de la Praga, unitatea de vânători de munte a lui nea Gigi a plecat din Cehia spre România în marş forţat, pe jos, câte 80 de kilometri pe zi. Pe vremea aceea nu mai mergeau trenurile, nu existau autobuze, nu prea mai erau avioane, iar

glances. There followed a moment of silence. Motionless, they looked at each other for a while, and one of the Russians showed them a grenade, then the concrete pillbox on the slope. All in the deepest silence, beneath heaps of burnt branches. Gaffer Gigi couldn't speak Russian. The only language he spoke was Romanian. But here it was easy to understand: they were together in the same situation. It was clear that none of the four wanted to be on that cold, wet slope, and men who love life don't deserve to be sent off to war. They advanced another ten yards together, uphill, heaving each other up by the shoulders, dragging each other and supporting each other, in single file, hauling themselves towards the summit, the four of them, like a snake made up of human bodies. At one point the head of the snake rose about three feet and spat out a grenade. The explosion followed nearby. After that, there was silence, the murderous machine gun stopped, and Gaffer Gigi escaped once more with his life and all in one piece.

When the war ended, and after Gaffer Gigi's unit of mountain hunters had taken part in the parade through Prague, they were force-marched back through Czechoslovakia, at a rate of fifty miles a day. At the time, the trains weren't running, there were no buses, there weren't

caii erau rezervaţi numai pentru parăzi. Când ne povestea asta, nea Gigi se lăuda: am mers pe jos de la Sevastopol la Praga şi înapoi! Am măsurat pământul cu pasul!

Patruzeci de ani mai târziu, nea Gigi era în continuare fericit că locuia într-unul dintre puţinele sate din România care nu fuseseră cooperativizate. Era bucuros că are propria lui livadă, în care spunea că nu primeşte niciun fel de porunci de la nimeni, şi în care poate face ce are chef. Pentru el era foarte important asta. Nu îi plăcea să-i spui ce să facă. Cam în perioada aceea s-a întâmplat ca un exces de fertilitate să producă o neaşteptată explozie demografică în ograda lui: nea Gigi s-a trezit că are şapte vaci şi că nu are ce să le dea de mâncare. Nu le putea vinde, pentru că în România socialistă nimeni nu era interesat să cumpere o vacă. Nu le putea tăia, pentru că tăierea unui animal aşa de important ar fi însemnat o pagubă la adresa şeptelul naţional. Şi uite aşa, vreme de doi ani, nea Gigi a avut pe cap şapte vaci, cu care nu mai ştia ce să facă. Pleca dimineaţa cu ele spre păşune şi le înjura de parcă ele ar fi fost de vină cu ceva. La grămadă, laolaltă cu vacile, înjura şi orânduirea socialistă şi toată politica idioată care nu-i permitea să scape de vaci, şi îl mai înjura şi pe Petru Groza, din motive pe care numai el şi le amintea.

many planes, and the horses were reserved for parades only. When he used to tell us this story, Gaffer Gigi would boast: 'I walked from Sevastopol to Prague and back! I've measured the earth with my steps!'

Forty years later, Gaffer Gigi was happy that he still lived in one of the few villages in Romania that had not yet been collectivized. He was happy that he had his own orchard, where he said he took orders from no man, and where he could do as he pleased. For him this was very important. He didn't like people telling him what to do. It was around that time that a superabundance of fertility produced a demographic explosion in his farmyard: Gaffer Gigi found himself with seven cows and nothing to feed them with. He couldn't sell them, because in socialist Romania no one was interested in buying a cow. He couldn't have them slaughtered, because the slaughter of such an important animal would have been to the detriment of the national livestock. And so, for two years, Gaffer Gigi had seven cows on his hands, and he didn't know what to do with them. He would take them to pasture in the morning and curse them as though they were to blame for something. Lumping them all in together with the cows, he would also curse the socialist system and the whole idiotic policy that

Atunci când revoluția română a adus încă o eliberare, a treia sau a patra pentru nea Gigi, primul lucru pe care el l-a făcut a fost să vândă cinci dintre vaci. A oprit-o pe cea mai bătrână şi pe cea mai tânără, pe baza unui raționament care avea sens numai pentru el.

Înainte însă de a fi împroprietărit cu livada aceea, pe care o primise în calitatea lui de veteran de război, nea Gigi nu avusese niciun fel de pământ. În vara care a precedat împroprietărirea, a plecat voluntar pe unul dintre acele şantiere ale tineretului unde partidul comunist construia ceva. Era o vale strâmtă între Transilvania şi sudul țării, un loc pe unde nicio cale de acces nu existase vreodată şi pe unde se construia o şosea şi o cale ferată. Munții erau sparți cu dinamita, cu o temeritate care amintea de bătăliile războiului, şi pentru care era nevoie de specialişti. Pentru nea Gigi dinamitarea munților era o joacă, o glumă pe lângă exploziile cu care avusese de-a face în război. Într-una dintre serile acelea a făcut o faptă pentru care avea să primească o înaltă decorație românească pentru eroism pe timp de pace.

wouldn't allow him to get rid of the cows, and for reasons known only to him he would curse Petru Groza, the first communist prime-minister, too.

When the Romanian Revolution brought yet another liberation, the third or fourth for Gaffer Gigi, the first thing he did was to sell five of the cows. He kept the oldest and the youngest, based on reasoning that made sense only to him.

However, before he became owner of that orchard, which he had been granted in his capacity as a war veteran, Gaffer Gigi had owned no land at all. In the summer before he was given the land, he was sent off to the construction sites where the communist party was building something. It was in a narrow valley between Transylvania and the south of the country, a previously inaccessible place where they were building a road and a railway. They blasted the mountains with dynamite, with a temerity that recalled the battles of the war, and for which experts were required. For Gaffer Gigi, dynamiting the mountains was child's play, a joke compared to the explosions he had come up against in the war. One evening, he performed a deed for which he was to receive Romania's highest decoration for heroism during peacetime.

It is said that night had fallen and the labourers were

Se povesteşte că se lăsase noaptea şi muncitorii s-au pus pe băut. Tabăra voluntarilor era pe versantul muntelui, iar jos, în vale, tulbure şi negru de cărbune, curgea râul. Deodată se auzi un răcnet speriat, *aaaaau!*, urmat de strigătul *Trăiască Stalin!* Nea Gigi a fost primul care a priceput ce se petrece. Cineva căzuse în vale şi, cel mai probabil, s-a dus grămadă până la râu. A aprins o torță şi s-a uitat dincolo de stânci, pe coastă, în jos. Acolo l-a văzut pe secretarul de partid al brigăzii, rămas suspendat de turul pantalonilor undeva deasupra prăpastiei şi balansându-se în voia vântului. Omul era convins că va muri, şi de aceea îşi încheia de acolo, din semilevitație, socotelile cu lumea. Strigă încă o dată, de data aceasta lung şi baritonal: *Trăiască clasa muncitoare!* Nea Gigi şi-a legat o funie de siguranță în jurul brâului, a fixat-o de un stâlp, şi a început să coboare în prăpastie după el, deasupra râului învolburat. Secretarul de partid nu-l putea vedea, pentru că atârna cu fața în jos, în întunericul nopții. Era îngrozit şi privea sub el stâncile şi râul, şi din când în când îşi striga testamentul: *Fir-ar mama ei a dracului de băutură.* Apoi: *Trăiască marele conducător Iosif Visarionovici Stalin!* Sau, mai personal: *Ah, ce doare.* Şi cu furie şi credință, atunci când vântul începea să bată mai tare: *Trăiască victoria socialismului!* Până la urmă nea Gigi l-a ridicat

in their cups. The volunteers' camp was on a mountain slope, and in the valley below, turbid and black as coal, flowed a river. All of a sudden a frightened shout was heard, *ooooow!* followed by the cry *Long live Stalin!* Gaffer Gigi was the first to realize what was happening. Someone had fallen downhill and, most likely, had rolled down as far as the river. He lit a torch and peered over the rocks, down the slope. There he saw the brigade's party secretary, suspended by the seat of his pants somewhere above the ravine and swinging in the wind. The man was convinced he was about to die, and that was why, from his position of semi-levitation, he was settling his accounts with the world. He called out once more, this time in a drawn-out, baritone voice: *Long live the working class!* Gaffer Gigi tied a rope around his waist, attached it to a post, and began to descend into the ravine above the raging waters. The party secretary couldn't see him, because he was dangling face down, in the blackness of the night. He was terrified and gazing below him at the rocks and the river, now and then crying out his last will and testament: *Damn liquor to hell!* Then: *Long live the great leader Joseph Visarionovich Stalin!* Or, on a more personal note: *Ow, it hurts*. And with fury and faith, when the wind began blowing harder: *Long live the victory of socialism!* In the

de acolo, trăgându-l de acelaşi tur al pantalonilor de care până atunci atârnase, la lumina torţelor şi sub chipurile uimite ale celor care asistaseră de la distanţă la întreaga scenă.

— Am făcut chestii şi mai şi, zicea nea Gigi, mai cu seamă în război, dar nu am primit o decoraţie aşa de importantă ca atunci. De unde concluzia lui: important e despre turul căror pantaloni este vorba.

— Cel mai important lucru pe care l-am aflat în viaţă, spunea nea Gigi după ce termina de povestit, e că cele mai frumoase sunt cehoaicele. Închidea ochii şi vedea aievea momentul lui de glorie când a purtat pe umăr singurul drapel românesc în oceanul acela de drapele sovietice, în parada victoriei de la Praga. Cehoaicele acelea frumoase (legenda lui personală spune) l-ar fi aplaudat pentru că el se ţinea mândru în şa şi era impresionant pe calul acela alb, singurul cal prezentabil pe care statul major îl mai avea la dispoziţie în ziua parăzii victoriei, şi pe care l-au trimis să ducă steagul, ca să nu râdă de noi tovarăşii sovietici.

end, Gaffer Gigi brought him back up, hauling him by the seat of the same pants by which he had been hanging, in the light of the torches and under the astonished eyes of those who witnessed the whole scene from above.

'I've done even more daring things,' Gaffer Gigi used to say, 'especially during the war, but until then I never received such an important decoration.' Whence his conclusion: 'What's important is the seat of whose pants is involved.'

'The most important thing I have found out in life,' Gaffer Gigi used to say, after he had finished telling his stories, 'is that Czech women are the most beautiful.' He closed his eyes and saw vividly his moment of glory, when he carried on his shoulder the Romanian flag in that ocean of Soviet flags, in the Prague victory parade. Those Czech women (his personal legend tells) cheered him because he was sitting proudly in the saddle and his white horse was so impressive, the only presentable horse that the general staff still had available for the day of the victory parade, and mounted on which they sent him to bear the flag, so that our Soviet comrades wouldn't laugh at us.

[Translated into English by Alistair Ian Blyth]

Simona Popescu



Sesam, deschide-te!

Pe la sfârşitul anilor ‘30, bunicul meu venea la Bucureşti să cumpere marfă de la negustorii de pe Lipscani. Lipscani era o stradă comercială din centru, cu magazine şi dughene gemând de lucruri, de lume, de cocoane şi chivuțe, de domni şi țărani, de copii şi bătrâni, de negustori austrieci, bulgari,



Open Sesame

In the late ‘30s, my grandfather would come to Bucharest to buy goods from the traders on Lipscani. At that time the commercial street in the city’s heart bristled with shops, stalls, goods, ladies and whitewashers, gentlemen and peasants, children and elderly people. You’d find him among the

greci, evrei, albanezi, armeni sau ce-or mai fi fost, fiecare cu afacerea lui. Şi, printre ei, bunicul meu, tânăr şi frumos — semăna foarte mult cu regele Mihai, care pe atunci era doar un adolescent. În timp ce bunicul meu alegea din toate pentru micuța lui prăvălie (pe care o ținea împreună cu tatăl lui într-un sat din sudul țării), în altă parte a oraşului, un băiat, Costel, se angaja ucenic la un fotograf. Se plimba, poate, pe-acolo şi francezul Paul Morand, care în 1935 va publica la Paris o carte despre un Bucureşti mai degrabă vesel, regretând că, pe Lipscani, locul negustorilor din Leipzig a fost luat „de prăvălii ieftine, iar mătasurile din Canton au cedat locul mai prozaicei mătase artificiale".

În anii '50, nu se ştie ce fotografia fostul ucenic, care avea acum cam 25 de ani. Doar familii cu copii şi îndrăgostiți? Un american nimerit cine ştie cum prin oraş făcea nişte poze pe care le-am găsit pe blogul unui tânăr fotograf. O mină de aur. De pe vremea aia s-au păstrat mai mult poze solemne, panorame cu clădiri. Culmea, privit cu ochiul unui american, Bucureştiul din anii '50 părea un oraş frapant de modern, dar... fără oameni. Unde erau oamenii? Cam pe atunci a început să fie oraşul asasinat (primele dărâmate au fost bisericile). Cei care l-ar fi putut apăra erau prin închisori sau se ascundeau.

merchants, whose nationalities ranged from Austrian to Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish, Albanian and beyond, all with their own businesses. Young and handsome, he closely resembled King Michael, then a mere teenager. And as he was selecting all kinds of items for the little shop he ran with his father in south Romania, in another part of that same village, a boy, Costel, employed as a photographer's apprentice, was forging his career. Knocking about on Lipscani, the French author the Paul Morand could also be spied: it all went into his 1935 Paris-published book, which portrayed Bucharest as a pretty cheerful place, despite his regret the Leipzig merchants had been replaced by 'cheap stalls, and the Canton silks have given way to the more prosaic, artificial sort.'

Later on, in the 50's, no one knew what photos that former apprentice, almost 25 by now, was taking. Families, kids, lovers... An American finding himself in the capital was among those photographed. I recently discovered his image on a young photographer's blog. A veritable gold-mine. Mostly solemn panoramas of buildings were preserved from that time. Paradoxically, Bucharest in the '50s seen through American eyes came over as strikingly modern, but ... where were the people? About that time, the city began to be defaced, and churches were the first to go. Those who could have

Aşa erau vremurile... Bunicul meu era şi el în închisoare, după ce i se vor fi confiscat pământul şi micuța lui prăvălie cu bunătăți aduse de pe strada Lipscani. Nu făcuse nimic rău bunicul meu, dar aşa erau vremurile, poate că s-o fi opus să-i ia comuniştii lui Stalin chiar tot ce adunase din munca lui şi a părinților lui de-o viață. Regele Mihai se afla undeva în exil, în Occident, în Anglia, apoi în Elveția, unde nu mai era rege, era doar Mihai, Mihai de România, ducea o viață simplă. Dar cine se mai gândea la el?

În anii '70 eu eram fericită, pentru simplul motiv că eram doar un copil şi părinții mei erau buni cu mine. În vacanțe, bunicul ne aştepta în stația de autobuz cu bicicleta lui veche, dintotdeauna. Într-o zi, am descoperit în casa lor o monedă de argint cu capul unui bărbat frumos. Aşa am aflat că trăisem într-o țară condusă cândva de un rege. Credeam că numai în poveşti se întâmpla asta. Ce chestie!

În anii '80, bunicul meşterea în tăcere la bicicleta lui cea veşnic stricată şi era mai tăcut ca oricând. Nu ştiu ce făcea regele Mihai, dar despre mine pot să spun că mă pregăteam să plec din orăşelul meu transilvan la facultate, la Litere, la Bucureşti, despre care se vorbea ca despre un oraş de neserioşi.

prevented the city from demolition either were in prison or kept to themselves. It came with communism. My grandfather was also in prison, the regime having confiscated his land and little shop with goods purchased on Lipscani Street. Not that he'd done anything wrong, but communism was like that. Perhaps he'd put up a fight when Stalin's henchmen had tried to seize his life's work and that of his parents. And King Michael? He was in exile somewhere in the West, England, and then Switzerland, where he was no longer King, just plain Michael of Romania, leading the simple life. No one thought about him any more.

In the '70s, a child with affectionate parents, I couldn't be happier. During the holidays, my grandfather would wait for us at the bus stop with his old bicycle from time immemorial. One day, in my grandparent's home, I discovered a silver coin with the head of a handsome man on it. This is how I found out my country had once been ruled by a king. In my mind, kings only existed in fairy tales. Wow!

In the '80s, my grandfather had grown utterly silent; most of the time, he would fix his eternally broken bicycle. I have no idea about King Michael's life. I for one was making preparations to leave my small Transylvanian town and go Bucharest, to study at the Faculty of Letters. People spoke of

Mie Bucureştiul, chiar aşa gri cum era pe vremea aia şi fără strălucirea de altădată, mi-a plăcut din prima. Mi-au plăcut oamenii, mai ales tinerii şi bătrânii. Tinerii pe care i-am cunoscut aveau nişte biblioteci grozave, erau şi foarte veseli, şi foarte trişti (uneori, deodată, ca omul cu umbra lui), puteam vorbi cu ei despre orice, iar bătrânii... Bătrânele bucureştence erau îngrijite, pudrate, cu inele frumoase pe degetele lungi şi slabe, o mai auzeai pe câte una vorbind în franceză cu căţelul scos la plimbare. Purtau pălăriuţe din anii '30 şi mănuşi de aţă, croşetate. Uneori erau cu soţii lor, care erau nişte oameni „de altădată". Cei mai „de altădată", cei mai frumoşi bătrâni, puteau fi văzuţi în pauzele concertelor de la Ateneu. O duceau cum nu se poate de greu, dar mergeau la Ateneu... Am cunoscut astfel de oameni. În Cişmigiu l-am întâlnit odată pe Nea Costel, venea zilnic pe-acolo cu aparatul lui de fotografiat, avea locul lui. Dacă voiai, îţi făcea o poză. Nea costel avea acum vreo 55 de ani. Strada mea preferată era strada Lipscani, unde erau nişte anticariate cu cărţi şi fotografii vechi cu Bucureştiul, printre altele. Cu anticarii era plăcut să vorbeşti. Te vedea unul cu o fotografie în mână. „Ăsta e Leonard!", îţi zicea. „Cum, nu ştii cine a fost Leonard?, se mira el. Şi-ţi spune povestea bărbatului superb şi foarte, foarte elegant, „prinţul

the capital then as the town of frivolity.

I loved the city from the start. Vivacious people, young and old, made up for its grey appearance and lost glory. I liked its people, and especially the young and the elderly. The young people I met had fantastic books at home. They were both very happy and very unhappy, sometimes even at the same time, like a man whose shadow is always there. I could talk to them just about anything. The aged women were elegant, powdered their faces, and wore rings on their long thin fingers. Some would even talk French to their dogs while they were taking them out. They wore hats like those worn in the 1930s and their gloves were of handmade lace. Their husbands sometimes accompanied them, and they looked like people from another time. Most of those people from another time, quite old now, gathered at the Athenaeum: you would see them during intermission. They were poor all right, but they would never give music up. I came to know some of them. In the Cişmigiu Gardens I once bumped into Uncle Costel, now 55, who would come there with his camera every day, he had spot of his own. He took photos of those who wanted one. And, of course, my favourite street was Lipscani. In its second hand bookshops I found so many old books, even old photographs of Bucharest. I liked talking to second hand

operetei” care s-a prăbuşit pe scenă în 1928.

Pe Lipscani era lume amestecată... multă viaţă, chiar şi în siniştrii ani de frig şi foame ‘80. Faţadele caselor cu un singur etaj, cu elemente de neobaroc, neoclasic sau stil francez, cu balconaşe care etalau varii feronerii, erau deja mutilate de însemnele părăsirii, ale paraginii. Fostele prăvălii adăposteau acum o marfă care mirosea a sărăcie, perdele ieftine, pânze care miroseau a chimicale, pantofi urâţi, butucănoşi, haine bădărane şi multe rochii urâte de mireasă sau lumânări pentru botez ori uniforme pentru şcolari. Locul îşi păstra, totuşi, farmecul. Dacă te nimereai pe-acolo seara era aşa... ca într-un film (de... Visconti?): treceai pe lângă neogoticul Car cu bere, la o aruncătură de băţ de biserica aia ca o bijuterie de piatră din 1724. În spate lăsai clădirea CEC-ului, construită cândva de un francez, Paul Gottereau. Puteai întâlni câte un copil murdărel şi necăjit, câte o femeie săracă şi veselă, câte un beţiv, apoi făceai stânga şi ajungeai pe Lipscani, copleşit de parfum de tei şi de splendoarea decrepitudinii, învăpăiată de amurgul bogat în purpură şi aur. Ajungeam în dreptul unei porţi vechi, prinse în ziduri dărâmate. Prin faţa acestei dantelării de lemn trecuse,

book-dealers. If you looked at some photo, they would come up: ‘This is Leonard! Don’t know him?’ And they would tell you the story of that handsome, extremely elegant man, the ‘prince of operetta’ who collapsed on stage in 1928.

Lipscani still attracted an assortment of characters and buzzed with activity even during the sinister 1980’s, despite the lack of heat and food. The one-storey houses, with their elements of Neo-Baroque, Neoclassic or French façades, with balconies displaying artistic rails of all kinds, were already forsaken and dilapidated. The old shops were still there, but the goods they sold had an air of poverty: cheap curtains, cloth redolent of chemicals, ugly, boorish shoes, churlish clothes and many ugly wedding dresses, candles for baptism, or school uniforms. And yet the street had its old charm. If you wandered around there at night, you’d feel you were in a movie by Visconti: you’d pass the Neo-Gothic restaurant *Caru’ cu bere*, a stone’s throw away from a beautiful church carved in stone as far back as 1724. Then there was the old *CEC* building, designed by a Frenchman—Paul Gottereau. Dirty, needy urchins, poor but cheerful women, drunkards... If you turned left, you were in Lipscani, with its smell of lime trees and magnificent misery, kindled by a sunset rich in purple and gold. An old gate, hinged upon demolished walls. My

sigur, şi bunicul meu. Acuma treceam eu şi înaintea mea un şobolan gras şi deloc grăbit. Deasupra noastră — a porții, a mea, a şobolanului — se înălța deja luna.

Dincolo de ziduri, de fațade, nu erau doar săracii care ocupaseră vechile case ale nimănui acum, goale, reci şi triste, dar şi, refugiat, trecutul, Timpul altor timpuri, lumea cea frumoasă, de pretutindeni. Erau magazinele de antichități. Cel mai mare dintre ele, Hanul cu tei, era peştera lui Ali Baba. *Sesam, deschide-te!* Urcam scările şi puteam privi îndelung câte şi mai câte... Priveam... TRECUTUL. Lucruri minunate, obiecte, fotografii.. Cine erau oamenii ăştia din fotografii? Ce se alesese de ei? Ale cui fuseseră obiectele? Cum ajunseseră aici? Pe străduțele alăturate, alte magazine de acelaşi fel, în care însă erau amestecate minunățiile cu lucruri oarecare, hale cu tablouri de toate felurile şi scaune, sofale, mese cu picioare care se terminau cu labe de leu, sticlărie ieftină, bibelouri şi imitații. Într-una din aceste prăvălii am cumpărat odată un pocal de cristal cu însemnele regale, foarte frumos. Vânzătorul era un tip plictisit, mi l-a dat pe mai nimic. I-am arătat elegantul pahar altui anticar, care a luat obiectul în mână cu un fel de admirație — aparținuse familiei regale, nu era nicio îndoială.

grandfather must have seen this wooden carving in old times. Now it was my turn: a fat slow rat dragged its belly ahead of me. And above us — above the gate, the rat and myself — the moon was already up.

Hidden by walls, by the façades, poor people had appropriated the sad, old, empty, abandoned houses inside which the past itself had taken refuge. Other times, a universally beautiful life. The largest of the antiquarian shops, *Hanul cu tei*, was Ali Baba's Cave. I'd climb the stairs, and *Open Sesame!* There was the PAST. Wonderful things, objects, photographs. Who were those people in them? What had become of them? Whom had these objects belonged to? How had they got here? In the surrounding streets, there were similar shops full of memorabilia and vulgar trifles, huge rooms with all kinds of paintings, chairs, sofas, tables with legs that ended in lion paws, cheap glassware, trinkets and imitations. In one of those shops I once bought a very beautiful crystal goblet with the royal emblem. The salesman, a rather bored chap, sold it to me for a song. I showed it to another antiquarian and sensed his admiration from the way he touched it— it had belonged to the royal family, no doubt about that.

Bucureştiul vechi, istoric, începuse să fie demolat ca să se construiască blocuri, cutii de beton. Scoşi din casele lor, oamenii se mutau în locuințele astea şi, poate, îşi duceau o parte din obiectele lor frumoase acolo, pe Lipscani, unde se deschideau uşi spre alte timpuri...

În 1990 Lipscanii arătau ca naiba. Nici amurgul de purpură şi aur nu mai învăluia mizeria străzii. Apăruseră chioşcuri de metal cu grilaje foarte urâte şi o marfă ieftină şi kitsch pe care aveam s-o văd şi la Paris, de pildă, prin zona Pigalle. Treceam pe străduțele din jurul Lipscanilor şi îmi tot imaginam viitorul. Viitorul oraşului meu. Mi-era milă de el, îi doream o soartă mai bună. Oamenii lui, atât de veseli şi atât de trişti (o combinație pe care n-am întâlnit-o în multe locuri), o meritau, poate.

L-am văzut, viitorul, anul ăsta, cînd am fost cu un văr din Elveția la o plimbare prin oraşul pe care acum îl redescoperea (şi eu alături de el). Nu mi-a venit să cred. Înviaseră străzile. Aici, unde erau pe vremuri mărgelarii, am găsit, din nou, mici prăvălii cu kilograme de mărgele de murano de toate felurile, din care poți să-ți faci singur colierul. Aici, unde erau altădată abagii, am văzut magazine cu splendide desfăşurări de mătăsuri, de atlase, de organza, materiale de toate felurile. Peste tot, revărsate, una lângă alta, terase, cluburi, restaurante.

Old Bucharest was being demolished, and blocks of flats like concrete boxes were being built all over. Thrown out of their homes, people moved into these blocks, and maybe they were bringing some of their beautiful objects to be sold on Lipscani, where gates opened onto other times...

In 1990, Lipscani looked awful. The gold and purple twilight could no longer mantle its indigence. Metal kiosks with ugly bars had cropped up, carrying cheap goods and tawdry objects of the kind I later on found in Paris's, in the Pigalle area. Scouring the streets near Lipscani, I kept imagining the future. I felt so sorry for my city. Its people, happy and sad at the same time—which you do not see in many places, had deserved a better fate than this.

I saw that future this year, and could hardly believe my eyes. I was strolling with my cousin from Switzerland. We were both rediscovering Bucharest. The streets had come back to life. Everywhere pavements gushed with cafés, clubs and restaurants thriving side by side. Dozens of names in foreign languages, all resembling book titles. *Amsterdam Grand, Arrogance, El Dictator, The Elbow Room.. Open Sesame!* Crowds of people, girls, boys, ladies and gentlemen. From place to place, a new bank branch or a decaying façade waiting for its

Şi lume, lume multă, fete şi băieți, domni şi doamne. Din loc în loc cîte un sediu nou de bancă sau fațade distruse care îşi aşteaptă proprietarul, demolarea, poate. Între două terase noi, un vechi magazin din altă epocă, cu firma spălăcită pe care scria mare CURCUBEUL. Ce să fi fost *Curcubeul*? O librărie? O simplă listă, cu doar câteva din numele pe care le poți citi plimbându-te azi pe străduțele din zona Lipscani, spune, cred, destule: *Café des Beaux Arts*, *Hanul Hangiței*, *Bambus Garden*, *Goblin*, *Swing House*, *Grota Zarafi*, *Fire Club*, *Bruno Wine Bar*, *Club A*, *Silver*, *El Comandante*, *Sixtina*, *Mes Amis*, *Les Bourgeois*, *Dirty Harry*, *Lucky 13*, *Amsterdam Grand Café*, *Orient Express Bar*, *Suburbia*, *Queen Clown Pub*, *Impaler*, *Coffe Right Lipscani*, *Old Town*, *Iron City*, *Salt Pizza*, *Loggia*, *Bordello Pub*, *Malagamba*, *Terasa La Ruine*, *Charme*, *Medieval House*, *Cafée Vilacrosse*, *Shakespeare Bar*, *Bojo*, *Le Drakkar*, *Margo Lounge*, *Tabiet*, *The Vintage Pub*, *Arrogance*, *Fat Cat*, *Dharma Bar*, *Chocolat*, *El Dictator*, *Arcade Café*, *Freddo Café*, *DDB Café*, *Market 8*, *Divan*, *Unique Bistro*, *Marijuana Coffee Shop*, *Café Austria Souvenirs*, *Boulevard Pub*, *Paradise Club*, *Spell*, *Bauhaus*, *The Vault Club*, *The Elbow Room*, *Ai Vecchi Amici*, *Mojo Music Life Club*, *Cafeneaua Smârdan*, *Trafic Punkt*, *Switch*, *Deko Café*, *Klein Bar and Bistro*, *Hanul cu tei*, *Atelier Café*, *Backstage*, *Interbelic*, *Offside Pub*, *La Historia*, *Expirat*, *La Bonne Bouche*, *The Embassy*.

owner or maybe demolition. Between two new cafés, an old shop from another age, with a faded signboard written in capital letters: THE RAINBOW. What could *The Rainbow* have been? A bookshop? A simple list of shop names around Lipscani will tell a long story: *Café des Beaux Arts*, *Hanul Hangiței*, *Bambus Garden*, *Goblin*, *Swing House*, *Grota Zarafi*, *Fire Club*, *Bruno Wine Bar*, *Club A*, *Silver*, *El Comandante*, *Sixtina*, *Mes Amis*, *Les Bourgeois*, *Dirty Harry*, *Lucky 13*, *Amsterdam Grand Café*, *Orient Express Bar*, *Suburbia*, *Queen Clown Pub*, *Impaler*, *Coffe Right Lipscani*, *Old Town*, *Iron City*, *Salt Pizza*, *Loggia*, *Bordello Pub*, *Malagamba*, *Terasa La Ruine*, *Charme*, *Medieval House*, *Cafée Vilacrosse*, *Shakespeare Bar*, *Bojo*, *Le Drakkar*, *Margo Lounge*, *Tabiet*, *The Vintage Pub*, *Arrogance*, *Fat Cat*, *Dharma Bar*, *Chocolat*, *El Dictator*, *Arcade Café*, *Freddo Café*, *DDB Café*, *Market 8*, *Divan*, *Unique Bistro*, *Marijuana Coffee Shop*, *Café Austria Souvenirs*, *Boulevard Pub*, *Paradise Club*, *Spell*, *Bauhaus*, *The Vault Club*, *The Elbow Room*, *Ai Vecchi Amici*, *Mojo Music Life Club*, *Cafeneaua Smârdan*, *Trafic Punkt*, *Switch*, *Deko Café*, *Klein Bar and Bistro*, *Hanul cu tei*, *Atelier Café*, *Backstage*, *Interbelic*, *Offside Pub*, *La Historia*, *Expirat*, *La Bonne Bouche*, *The Embassy*.

Fast Rewind. În 1992, regele Mihai avea să vină de sărbătorile Paştelui în Bucureşti. S-au umplut străzile atunci, eram şi eu pe-acolo, pe undeva lângă Lipscani. Asta după ce în 1990 l-au întors din drum pe aeroport. În 1995 a murit bunicul meu. În 1997 regelui Mihai i s-a dat înapoi cetățenia română. Bunicul avea 89 de ani când a murit. Acum o săptămână, regele Mihai a împlinit 89 de ani. Seamănă perfect cu bunicul meu de 89 de ani. Din socotelile mele, dacă mai trăieşte, nea Costel are, şi el, vreo 85 de ani. Cât despre mine... Despre Bucureştiul „meu", căci despre asta e vorba acum, aş avea atâtea de spus… De câte ori ies pe stradă ştiu că o să mă surprindă. Dar şi din casă e interesant ce văd. Dacă mă las puțin pe spate cu scaunul, văd printre acoperişurile caselor interbelice, profilată pe fundalul unei misterioase clădiri, ca de poveste, o parte din fața unui uriaş Moş Crăciun de plastic. A atârnat într-un decembrie pe fațada Teatrului Țăndărică, a fost retras prin ianuarie, dar… nu de tot! Stă cu nasul în sus, se uită la cer Moş Crăciun. L-am privit prin perdeaua de zăpadă, prin ploaie, au înflorit copacii în jurul lui, apoi au înfrunzit, apoi frunzele au căzut, apoi a nins, apoi a venit primăvara şi tot aşa. Au trecut anii. E acolo sus, i se vede doar jumătatea de sus a capului, are barbă albă, un nas uriaş şi căciulă. Acum, cerul spre care priveşte este perfect senin.

Fast Rewind. In 1992, King Michael was to spend his Easter holidays in Bucharest. People flooded the streets, and I was there too. Back in 1990 the king was not even allowed to go beyond the airport in Bucharest. In 1995 my grandfather died. Two years later King Michael was given back his Romanian citizenship. Grandfather was 89 years old when he died. A week ago, King Michael turned 89. He resembles perfectly my grandfather when he was 89. If he is still alive, uncle Costel must be about 85 now. As for Bucharest, since this is my real topic here, there is so much to say now... Every time I go out, I know I will be surprised. From my room, if I lean back in my chair a little, I can see the roofs of old houses, and half of the face of a huge plastic Santa Claus pops up among them, stuck to a mysterious building. He was hung on the façade of the Țăndărică Theatre in December years ago; it was taken down in January, but ... not completely! Santa Claus is holding his nose up, and he is looking at the sky. I have watched him through snow, through rain, the trees have bloomed around him, they were covered in green leaves, then the leaves have fallen, then it snowed again, spring came, and so on. Years went by. He is up there and one can only see the top half of his head, he has a white beard, a huge nose and a cap. Now, the sky he is looking at is perfectly clear.

La Hanul cu tei am văzut nu demult un splendid covor oriental, cu un model care se numeşte *Pana fericirii*... Nu ştiu dacă Bucureştiul e un oraş frumos sau urât, depinde cu ce ochi îl priveşti, depinde cât ştii despre el, depinde în ce parte a lui te afli. Depinde cine eşti chiar tu! Şi contează dacă ai formula: *Sesam, deschide-te!*

At *Hanul cu Tei* I have recently seen a gorgeous Oriental carpet with a pattern which is called the Plume of Happiness… I don't know if Bucharest is a beautiful or ugly city, it depends on how you look at it, how much you know about it, on what side of it you are standing. It depends on who you are! But the most important thing is to have the key to the city: *Open Sesame!*

[Translated into English by Gabriela Moateru]





Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Mircea Cărtărescu

Cunoşti tu ţara unde înfloresc lămâii?

aştept tramvaiul 26 în staţie la circul de stat.
toată şoseaua e aurie, iar copacii verzi, verzi şi cu atâtea frunze
că niciun renascentist nu le-ar putea picta pe toate.
mă holbez după tipe cu blugi şi tricouri foarte largi
pe ţâţica uneia scrie JOGGING — mă sucesc, mă-nvârtesc
trece un cinci şi pun degetul pe tabla lui roşie, caldă, şi mă gândesc la un vers
îl şi formulez : "în vara asta toţi am devenit mecanici auto,
toţi meşterim ceva pe sub caroseriile norilor"...

e jumătatea lui mai, e soare şi sunt buimac
copiii aduc profesoarelor crăci grosolane de liliac

Where Lemon Trees Bloom

I'm waiting for the no. 26 tram at the stop by the state circus.
the wide road looks golden and the trees are green, green and so full of leaves
that even a renaissance painter couldn't paint them all.
I'm staring at the girls in jeans and baggy T-shirts
'JOGGING' I read across one's budding tits—I twist around, completely wheel about.
A no. 5 passes by and I run my fingertips over the warm, red steel plating, conceiving of a verse
and phrasing it: 'this summer we've all become auto mechanics,
we're all repairing something under the clouds' body shop…'

It's the middle of May, it's summer and I'm becoming quite a wack
children bring their schoolteachers coarse branches of lilac

şi lăcrămioare în celofan
dacă te uiţi în soare rămâi în ochi cu un spân
mov lunecos, iar pe retină
cu mutre şi panglici violet de lumină.
soare, sticlosule, luno, hirsuto,
în vara asta toţi am devenit un fel de mecanici auto,
toţi meşterim ceva pe sub caroseriile norilor
toţi deşurubăm axul cardanic al florilor.

în fine, după un şir de 24 şi 4 apare şi 26.
mă-nghesui şi urc şi-mi găsesc un loc lângă geamul din spate.
şoseaua scânteiază de te înnebuneşte,
dar inima ta e rece, căci n-ai nicio dragoste
şi nu mai înţelegi nimic din vitrine
şi nu mai poţi scrie, decât scrisori tâmpite şi inutile.
deschid "trecutul utopic" de himmelmann cu frumoasa ei copertă albastră
şi citesc ce gândea goethe despre statui.

bucureştiul, la dreapta şi stânga, este şi nu-i.

and cellophane-wrapped lily-of-the-valley
if you look at the sun you'll get jabbed in the eye
by slippery-mauve splinters, and on your retina
a glare of faces and violet ribbons with a bright patina.
you, o glassy sun, you moon, o hirsute body astronomic,
this summer we've all become a sort of auto mechanics,
we're all repairing something under the clouds' body shop
we're all unscrewing the flowers' axle shafts nonstop.

Finally, after a series of 24's and 4's—a 26.
I push into the crowd and climb on, finding a place against the rear window.
the glitter of the street can make you feverish,
but your heart is cold, for you have no love
and in the shop windows you can't make out anything
and you can't write, only letters, dumb and useless.
I open Himmelmann's the utopian past bound in beautiful blue
and read about statues according to Goethean thought.

on my right, on my left, Bucharest is and is not.

[Translated into English by Adam J. Sorkin]

James Coon

Cenotaph



The townsfolk of Barbu were stirring to life one misty morning when a stranger appeared walking through their isolated village in the Carpathian mountains. Dressed in a rumpled morning suit of noticeable vintage and carrying a well-worn leather rucksack on his back, the stranger propelled his lanky frame towards the village square with a jaunty gait. The determined yet mirthful look on his angular face remained comically frozen as he insouciantly waved his monocle in a silent gesture of greeting to the gaping villagers.

Young Petru was the first to acknowledge this new presence in a formal way when he fell in behind the stranger like a shadow, mimicking his every gesture. Petru's two dogs soon joined the parade, walking on their hind legs and waving one paw to the crowd. Their skills were no match for an accomplished mimic like Petru, but it was a bold and worthy effort nonetheless.

The normally sluggish residents, unable to ignore such an unusual spectacle any longer, issued a rousing 'Huzzah!' that drowned out even the famously loud voice of Petru's mother, who was commanding him to return home 'this instant.' With the morning's torpor well and truly dispersed, the townsfolk linked arms and fell in behind Petru's dogs, sashaying towards the main square. It was quite a sight.



***

Meanwhile, the worthy burghers of Barbu had already forgathered in the Café Nostrum for their customary morning discussion of the weighty affairs of business and state. As always, the top spot on the agenda was the production of wooden coffins, the town's only industry and the source of its (or perhaps more accurately their) wealth. Mayor Popescu arose, tapped his spoon on the edge of his cup, and majestically harrumphed the meeting to order.

'Gentlemen, two hundred years ago today, our forefathers set us on the path to prosperity,' he intoned to the accompaniment of satisfied murmuring, 'by declaring that the village of Barbu would, for all eternity, devote itself exclusively to the production of wooden coffins.' The burghers grunted in assent and tapped their spoons on their cups.

'For generations, we have pursued that goal with great vigor. Barbu is known far and wide for producing the finest array of wooden coffins in the land — a box to fit every body and empty every wallet!' Contented sighs filled the room.

'Today I can announce that our production has reached a new pinnacle!' The burghers exploded into applause, vigorously nodding their heads at each other.

'Unfortunately, an insufficient number of people are dying and the coffins are piling up with no end in sight.' Concerned groans spiraled to the ceiling, accompanied by the frenzied sucking of teeth and censorious tut-tutting, as this sour note of reality struck the burghers where it hurt most — in their assets.

'Gentlemen, unless we find a way to move this dreck, we will be buried under an avalanche of coffins.' The burgers coughed loudly and cleared their throats, sensing that they



would soon be called upon to swallow something nasty.

'There are no good options. We can continue producing coffins and let the pile grow indefinitely. We can pay the townsfolk not to work. Or we can stop paying them and risk inciting a revolution. In short, we are teetering on the precipice of slippery slope that leads inevitably to the chamber pot of financial ruin.' The burghers pounded their fists on the tables and shook the rafters with chorus after chorus of contrapuntal harrumphing.

'Fortunately, we have with us today a representative from the Ministry of Profundity who has a plan to save our sorry assets.' And with that, Mayor Popescu deposited his ample rump on the near end of a long bench, thus launching to his feet the diminutive Mr. Kizyak, who had been anchoring the other end.

'Gentlemen, I will be short,' he piped. 'In this desperate hour we have only two choices: export coffins or import death! What will it be?'

'We Want Death!' they all sang out, finding their voices at last.

'I knew the prospect of death would rouse you to life!' he said. 'Now give me more passion!'

'Death! Death! Death!' they chanted, their chubby fists raised in salute.

'I have a scheme!' he squealed to raucous approbation. 'I see a day when a Barbuscan coffin will adorn every street corner and every doorway in every town in the land! People will use them to furnish their living rooms, bedrooms, gardens, and garages. There is no end in sight — Long Live Death!'

'Long Live Death!' they echoed.

'Henceforth,' he continued, 'the Ministry of Adulation will declare every citizen to be a National Hero entitled to a personalized Barbuscan coffin and a multi-volume biography of their



accomplishments in service to the nation, written in advance, of course, and paid for by the word.' In a sly stage whisper, he added, 'They can also buy vouchers redeemable for additional coffins and biographies.' After a pregnant pause, he sang out, 'The competition for adulation will create an unending demand for Death and Words!'

'Naturally, the authorities will dispose of any actual remains strictly on the hush-hush,' Mayor Popescu tittered with relish.

'We will show the world,' Mr. Kizyak roared, 'that this truly is the Land of Opportunity — where every man, woman, and child, regardless of their race, creed, colour, ethnicity, or social standing has an equal right to claim special privileges and receive Absolutely Nothing at Enormous Expense!'

'Long Live The Fatuous Cycle of Prosperity!' the burghers shouted. 'Long Live the Scheme!'

'Your wish is my command,' Mr. Kizyak said, bowing. At that moment, the townsfolk paraded past the café. The burghers leaped over the bowing Mr. Kizyak and ran to the window just in time to see the real source of their wealth holding hands and skipping towards the village square. 'Oh, the mirthful clatter of it all,' they wailed amid much gnashing of teeth. 'What a mournful sight!'

***

The stranger abruptly halted in front of the extraordinarily large and elaborately carved wooden coffin that had dominated Barbu's village square for generations, ever reminding the citizenry of the town's main industry. Pirouetting on his left foot, the stranger spun around three



times before stopping with his right foot forward and both hands outstretched like a vaudeville singer.

'Hot diggety-diggety dog!' he sang out. Petru and the canines followed his lead as best they could, and the townsfolk spread out to get a good view of what was shaping up to be quite a show. Easing the rucksack from his shoulders, the stranger addressed the crowd for the first time:

'My name is Venlo Gegenuber, but you can call me Vinny.'

'Yo! Vinny!' the crowd responded in unison. Venlo Gegenuber bowed and then dumped the contents of his rucksack on the ground in front of Petru. The boy's eyes grew wide with anticipation at the sight of the growing pile of gaily-coloured pieces of wood of various shapes and sizes. Being no one's fool, he immediately knew which end was up and began fitting the pieces together.

At first, the townsfolk chuckled softly and, bending a bit at the knees, gently rocked fore and aft on their feet in smug anticipation of Petru's coming humiliation. They could not imagine this feckless little bumbler being able to make sense of anything, much less a jumble of painted sticks. But the smirks vanished from their faces when, with impressive speed, Petru presented them with the finished product: a hobby horse. Then Petru mounted the wooden stallion and rocked for all he was worth.

While the crowd was still focused on Petru, Venlo Gegenuber retrieved a large scroll from his bag. Holding the scroll in his hands like a sacrificial offering, he solemnly approached the crowd and unfurled it with a great flourish. The crowd turned their attention from Petru to the scroll. Bracing himself, Venlo Gegenuber inhaled deeply and read aloud:

The Hobby Horse Manifesto



Citizens, Denizens, and Finger-Poppin' Dadas,
Tilt me your Lobes!
The Clambake of Eternal Verity
Is a Blow Hole of Bombasity!
Only an Injection of Sheer Lunacy
Can Cut Out
This Wailing Bad Jazz!
Behold: The Hobby Horse!
I come to hip you to him!
The Hobby Horse Means Nothing!
The Hobby Horse Does Everything!
Do not be fooled by Pale Imitations!
This is the Authentic Article!
Archimedes rode a Hobby Horse: Eureka!
Lady Godiva rode a Hobby Horse: Hurray for Our Side!
All is overturned.
The Gegens are Uber!
The Ubers are Gegen!
Pimp your ride!
Save your hide!
Get Out Now

Before The Big Bog Blows!



Venlo Gegenuber nailed the scroll to the Coffin of Barbu and waited. The townsfolk gaped in stunned silence for a few moments, allowing the refreshing mountain air to enter through their mouths. Then without warning, Petru catapulted off the hobby horse and executed an aerial somersault that landed him on his feet before the crowd. 'You heard the man,' he said, snapping his fingers. 'Now get to it!'

Seemingly overnight, an astonishing transformation took place in the once sleepy Barbu as the workers abandoned their coffin-making tools and took up the manufacture of hobby horses. Giddy with excitement, the children, led by Petru, found new uses for the large pile of unsold coffins, converting some into traps for rabbits and turning others into rowboats. It was all great fun. The final coup de grace took place at the First Annual Barbu-Q when the townsfolk roasted sausages over burning coffins while listening to Petru's hobby horse singing 'Back in the Saddle Again.' At long last, a great wave of creativity and optimism swept over the land, and all seemed right with the world.

***

Back at the Café Nostrum, it did not take long for the burghers to reach their wit's end, as it was a very short journey indeed. With their left arms behind their backs and their right hands stroking their chins, they leaned forward in dense contemplation and followed each other around in a circle like circus elephants walking trunk to tail. Mayor Popescu and Mr. Kizyak led the procession. And that's how Barbu's best and brightest spent the remainder of their days —

travelling in circles — for such is the fate of big wheels.

***

Soon there were sightings of a most extraordinary nature all across Europe. In Bucharest, Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, Berlin and elsewhere, bystanders reported seeing Venlo Gegenuber driving a lilac-colored Duesenberg through a Triumphal Arch of Scrolls. Crowds greeted him with fireworks displays and cheered 'All Hail the Messiah of Meshugenah!' Trailing the Duesenberg was a tulip-festooned wagon upon which Petru rode his singing hobby horse.

***



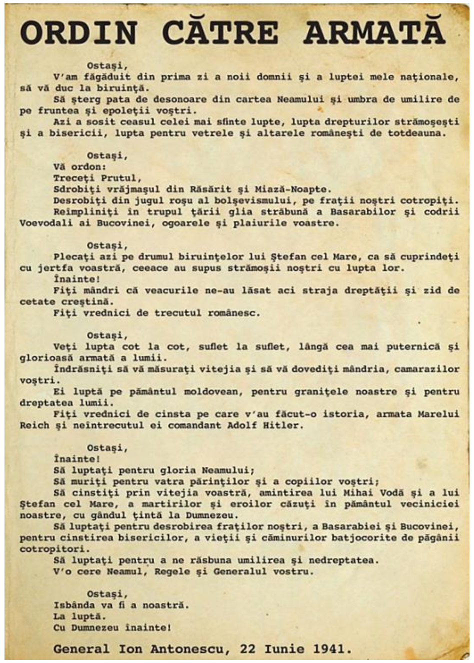
At this point, the editor paused in his reading. He removed his glasses and stared at the ceiling for a few moments before gently coughing. 'Sir, many strange things happened in 1989, but the idea that this Gegenuber fellow spread revolution throughout the capitals of Europe? That's ridiculous, not to mention the singing hobby horse. I'm afraid this just won't do. We have our reputations to consider.'

Petru was not surprised. A generation had passed … and now this new generation, marinated in a treacly slurry of processed advertising and homogenized multi-tasking and cocooned in a half-baked meringue of manufactured outrage, was itself desperately in need of a fresh injection of sheer lunacy. Rising from his chair, Petru dropped on the editor's desk a charred piece of wood with a large iron nail running through it.

'What's this?' the editor asked. 'The final nail in the Coffin of Barbu,' Petru said. 'I drove

it in myself just before we set it ablaze.' On that note, Petru departed in silence, leaving the editor to his thoughts.

[Written in English]



ORDIN CĂTRE ARMATĂ

Ostaşi,

V'am făgăduit din prima zi a noii domnii şi a luptei mele naţionale, să vă duc la biruinţă.

Să şterg pata de desonoare din cartea Neamului şi umbra de umilire de pe fruntea şi epoleţii voştri.

Azi a sosit ceasul celei mai sfinte lupte, lupta drepturilor strămoşeşti şi a bisericii, lupta pentru vetrele şi altarele româneşti de totdeauna.

Ostaşi,

Vă ordon:

Treceţi Prutul,

Sdrobiţi vrăjmaşul din Răsărit şi Miază-Noapte.

Desrobiţi din jugul roşu al bolşevismului, pe fraţii noştri cotropiţi.

Reimpliniţi în trupul ţării glia străbună a Basarabilor şi codrii Voevodali ai Bucovinei, ogoarele şi plaiurile voastre.

Ostaşi,

Plecaţi azi pe drumul biruinţelor lui Ştefan cel Mare, ca să cuprindeţi cu jertfa voastră, ceeace au supus strămoşii noştri cu lupta lor.

Înainte!

Fiţi mândri că veacurile ne-au lăsat aci straja dreptăţii şi zid de cetate creştină.

Fiţi vrednici de trecutul românesc.

Ostaşi,

Veţi lupta cot la cot, suflet la suflet, lângă cea mai puternică şi glorioasă armată a lumii.

Îndrăsniţi să vă măsuraţi vitejia şi să vă dovediţi mândria, camarazilor voştri.

Ei luptă pe pământul moldovean, pentru graniţele noastre şi pentru dreptatea lumii.

Fiţi vrednici de cinsta pe care v'au făcut-o istoria, armata Marelui Reich şi neîntrecutul ei comandant Adolf Hitler.

Ostaşi,

Înainte!

Să luptaţi pentru gloria Neamului;

Să muriţi pentru vatra părinţilor şi a copiilor voştri;

Să cinstiţi prin vitejia voastră, amintirea lui Mihai Vodă şi a lui Ştefan cel Mare, a martirilor şi eroilor căzuţi în pământul veciniciei noastre, cu gândul ţintă la Dumnezeu.

Să luptaţi pentru desrobirea fraţilor noştri, a Basarabiei şi Bucovinei, pentru cinstirea bisericilor, a vieţii şi căminurilor batjocorite de păgânii cotropitori.

Să luptaţi pentru a ne răsbuna umilirea şi nedreptatea.

V'o cere Neamul, Regele şi Generalul vostru.

Ostaşi,

Isbânda va fi a noastră.

La luptă.

Cu Dumnezeu înainte!

General Ion Antonescu, 22 Iunie 1941.



Jennifer Robertson

The Street Sweeper



I work at street level. No one notices Petru the cleaning man with his twig brush. What's this? A piece of dried-out orange peel? Dropped by a tourist, I guess. I haven't seen oranges in years. Or bananas. Those goodies remind me of Nella and the days when I was on the make. Now, though, it's safest just to keep your eyes on the ground.

These winter days snow clings to the river bank. The water is iced up and slow. Ducks congregate under the bridge where water still flows. Makes me think of the village where I grew up. Those wooden houses huddled together like bewintered ducks…

No streets there, or lights. A downpour of stars. I told my Gran that the stars were feathers from an angel's wings, but my brother Sandu knew better.

'There are no such things as angels,' he scoffed. 'I bet you've never seen an angel, Gran.'

Gran shook her head. 'Your mother was my angel girl. Pretty as a picture, always the one chosen to be the Lazarus bride. But she ran off with that foreign man. Petru here, he's the one who'll see an angel.'

That's what Gran always said: Petru's the one who'll see an angel — even though they put me away in reform school, a juvenile delinquent, needing to have my deviant mind reshaped by a shaven head. Not much time then for angels or stars. Except stars of anger when they knocked me around; alcoholic stars wobbling

across the pavement. Stars on my jacket too, once I was in their good books, riding high. Those little brass stars took me to Nella.





Her glossy hair tumbled over neat, slim shoulders. A body like a Western film star. Ah, Nella, my starlet, how you smiled when they promoted me! 'Well done, Petru,' you cooed, holding out my officer's jacket. 'Another star! You're heading right up the ranks!'

'All because of you, darling! I thank my lucky stars I met a girl like you, the angel of my life — well, not quite an angel, not always, thank goodness! You spread your wings and we fly to shops loaded with goodies: meat, instant coffee, hi-fi, booze… Who cares if our hands are just a tiny bit dirty?'

Nella laughed. She checked her nail varnish. 'I must rush now, Petru. I have a date with that new film director. We'll travel, go places.'

'Travel, that's right. See the world beyond these closed frontiers. Hard currency, that's what we need now.'

'I know how to get some. I'll introduce you to someone I know, a high-ranking officer…'

'He would have to be high-ranking for you, Nella…' But she had gone. High-ranking jobs meant you ask no questions about who you've just handed over to the firing squad. So long as it's not yourself. Sandu knew that as well. 'Rising high, Petru? Got what it takes, eh? No nuts and bolts and factory noise and grease for you. Oh, I met old Ion from the village the other day. Our Gran's on the way out.'

***

Gran lifted her head from her bumpy pillow, groaned as she got up, creaked down to her knees, groped under the iron bed and pulled out her holy picture.

'What a job I had rescuing you, holy angel, when they took Father Gavrilă away and tore our little church to splinters. Now, listen, it's that grandson of mine, the one called Petru. You've got your work cut out with the

likes of him, but I want you to spread protecting wings over my Petru.'

***



She left me. My bright angel left to become a star. The days were black and throbbing, nights were filled with spirits raw as the wounds I lashed across flesh and bone. What else could I do? It costs too much to disobey, especially if you want to buy a woman perfume or a slip her friends will envy. So I worked in a top security prison for faceless fathers far above.

***

'*Tatăl nostru*…Father above…' croaked Gran, alone in unwashed sheets. Her voice was thin as the mice under her bed, skeletal as the prayer of that prisoner who whispered his desperate *miluieşte-ne*, when Comrade Officer Petru marched into the cell with a couple of toughs.

'Saying your prayers, prisoner? You'll be praying to the devil before we've finished!'

Gavrilă's eyes widened with fear. Slowly, almost as if invisible strings were pulling at them, his fingers traced a cross. The guards attacked. Gavrilă's fingers cracked.

'Praying for pity?' Comrade Officer sneered.

The prisoner looked at him. And now recognition dawned like the burst of yellow light when, half-faint with fasting and lack of sleep, a little village boy had watched candle after candle, lit from a single flame, shed dull gold on ancient images of saints, blackened by incense and candle-smoke.

Those paschal flames had illumined the bearded priest in his much-darned golden vestments….



I attempted a laugh. 'Prayer meeting's over, boys.'

But — a job's a job and orders are orders. I went on with the bitter charade. 'Has food been issued to this prisoner today?'

Food? Pig swill, more like.

'Extend the fast over the next two days,' I ordered and left the cell.

I was on duty all that weekend. Why not? Working through holidays showed commitment to the cause. I went to my office and read up on the prisoner. It was heavy stuff. Gavrilă was a high security risk, an enemy of the people, scheduled for elimination.

Well, they couldn't fault my procedures. I wrote my report. Prisoner's hands broken after anti-state actions. Foodless regimen extended over holiday period.

Some holiday! I sat alone in the duty room, bruised and broken like that man in the cell, though I tried not to think too much of him.

But memories, once awakened, crowd around a person's mind like the spirits of the dead that sit on village rooftops waiting for the Easter bells to ring.

The living wait as well. Doors open at the first chime of the bell. Lamplight spills across melting snow. Everyone is astir. Only the old, the sick or the very young may sleep through the Easter vigil. Women carry baskets of painted eggs and mouth-watering *pască* — Easter cake. Little girls wear bright headscarves bound about their heads. Young boys wear smart shirts under their coats. Each child holds an unlit candle.

'Can you hear the frogs croaking?' Gran's thin lips break into a gap-toothed smile. 'That means we'll have a good summer.'

'Good summer,' the bell replies.

'*Miluieşte-ne*, have mercy' Gran says.

'*Miluieşte-ne*,' repeats the bell.

‘Hurry, Petru! The gates of heaven and hell are open. The Easter angel will lead lost souls to their eternal home tonight.’

***



No Easter vigil for me, not now, but just the same, I couldn’t sleep; and before it was fully daylight I went down to the underground cells. The prisoner must have heard my footsteps — and had the audacity to knock. Damn the man! Whatever could he want? I should have passed by, but I opened his door. My hand trembled on the lock. The prisoner stood to attention. Fear and resolution twisted his thin face.

‘*Domnule*, that is, Comrade Officer, may I have a small piece of bread?’

‘That’s breaking the rules and you know it…’

Mustn’t let former sympathies rule my actions. That way spelt disaster.

‘This hell-hole’s full of scroungers, you beat the lot of them….’

Was there no end to the effrontery of this man? His hand, thin as a small bird’s claw, timidly brushed my arm, detaining me.

‘Comrade Officer, along this underground corridor hungry men cry out for bread. Broken men weep. I’m sure you throw crumbs to sparrows. So then, give me just the smallest crumb to celebrate Paştile in our Romanian way.’

‘Bugger off!’ I slammed the door shut behind me.

So, he wanted bread…

Bread, good warm bread like my old Granny used to bake. Poor old Gran, she must be six feet under by now, but as I went back to my dingy office I was sure I smelt her home-made bread. I even heard her rustle around with that big basket she used to carry. Madness! I must be going soft in the head.

Petru's the one who will see an angel…

A newly-baked loaf sat on my desk. Unbelieving, I broke off a piece. The best I'd tasted in years! No state ovens baked bread like that. You couldn't even get it in hard currency shops. I hurried back down the corridor and turned the key in the prisoner's cell door.

'You asked for bread. Take it, quick! Don't tell anyone who gave it to you.'

The man's starved face lit up, amazed, flooded with gratitude. 'An angel has sent you, sir, bringing me the taste of Paradise.'

***



I fetched clean clothing: a warm shirt, thick trousers. The cold troubled him more than hunger. I heated water and stripped off his filthy clothes. Scars ran like ribbons over his back. I stared in shame at that awesome embroidery. He kissed my hands, my forehead, uttering words of blessing, and still I couldn't leave him.

'There'll be no more bullying while I'm in charge of this corridor,' I promised.

No more bullying meant no more stars. They tore off my jacket. 'Your deviant nature has got the better of you,' they said. 'It's down, not up for you from now on.'

Down, not up. I'm a no-hoper as far as the regime's concerned. Drink and loneliness do the rest. So I sweep streets. Girls tip-tap by on high heels, but no woman looks twice at me. I wonder what they would say, though, if they knew that the shabby street cleaner, none too steady on his feet, had found in the cell of death an angel whose broken hands held bread fragrant with the taste of Paradise.

[Written in English]

Grete Tartler

Opus mulierum

Vechile curți cu albii de rufe —
“mergi spre femeia ce spală şi spală şi tu”
(îți şoptesc) şi zarzării toți albesc dintr-o dată.
Cerul păleşte, se-mbaie în zumzet materia.
Miroase a albăstreală şi clocot de sulf.
Parcă n-ai şti că astfel se-nalță
aburii, rămâne în alambic doar țărâna.
Zarzării împietresc în corali.
E atât de uşor, femeiesc de uşor, să-ți speli ființa,
să te bucuri de primăvăratecul vânt
care-şi muşcă solzii din coadă,
să priveşti baloanele de săpun
care-ți cântă-ntre degete.
Doi copii trec ținând de capătul sforii
un balon transparent.

Opus mulierum

Old courtyards with tubs of laundry:
‘Go to the washerwoman and do your own washing’
I whisper to you, and the wild apricot trees
all turn suddenly white, the sky pales,
the world is soused in a drenching buzz.
There's a smell of bluebags and a sulphurous bubbling.
You'd hardly believe it — so much steam rises
that only dirt is left in the copper.
The wild apricots petrify into coral.
It's so easy — easy in a woman's way —
to wash your soul, to rejoice in the spring wind
shaking the scales on its dragon-tail
so that you're looking at soap-bubbles
it blows for you between your fingers.
Two children pass by, holding on a string

Ghemuiți în el stăm o clipă.

a balloon transparent as a bubble.
For a moment we are crouched inside it.

[Translated into English by Fleur Adcock]



Contemporary
Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Lucian Dan Teodorovici

Gumă de mestecat

Am cunoscut-o în bar cu mai puțin de două ore înainte şi am hotărât să închiriez o cameră la hotel, profitând astfel de economiile soției mele. Înainte de a o cunoaşte, mă gândeam patetic şi dezgustat la nevasta mea, care nu ştie decât să facă mâncare întreaga zi, să se certe ori să facă ordine în casă, de parcă ar mai putea fi dezordine după atâta ordine. În plus, îmi înjuram ghinionul de a avea un copil nătâng, căruia i se face rău de câteva ori pe zi şi vomită constant pe unul din picioarele mele, ca şi cum toaleta e făcută doar pentru altfel de treburi. Dar ce importanță mai au toate astea acum? Acum ea se dezbracă, mişcându-se lasciv în ritmul muzicii, se apropie de mine, mă sărută, îmi apucă o mână zâmbind provocator şi o aşază pe sânii ei…

— Vrei o gumă mentolată? mă întreabă şi, în momentul ăsta, senzația de satisfacție pe care o am se scurge într-un potop

Chewing Gum

I'd met her in a bar less than two hours earlier and decided to rent a hotel room as a way of making good use of my wife's savings. Just before I met her I was in a state of pathetic disgust thinking of my wife, who only knows to cook the whole day long, argue or tidy up the house, as if anything could still be untidy after all that tidying up. Additionally, I was cursing the misfortune of being father to a moron of a child who feels sick several times a day and pukes all over my feet on a regular basis, as if the toilet could only be used for other purposes. Yet such thoughts don't mean a thing now, do they? Now she's undressing, lasciviously swaying to the music, she walks up to me, gives me a kiss, takes hold of one of my hands with a provocative smile and lays it across her breasts…

"Want some mint-flavoured gum?" she asks, and that very instant the feeling of satisfaction I've been experiencing

de frământări. Îmi place cămaşa ta, completează într-o doară, cred că te-a costat destul de mult.

— Am primit-o...

Nu se mai întâmplă nimic în momentele următoare, până dimineață. Nu pot să fac sex cu ea, pentru că mi-este jenă. Fata asta gândeşte probabil că sunt un nenorocit care nu se spală pe dinți cu săptămânile. Dacă soția mea ar fi fost în locul ei, i-aş fi râs batjocoritor în față — soția mea nu merită efortul de a mă spăla pe dinți când o sărut.

Dimineață, fata îmi aruncă un zâmbet compătimitor şi dispreţuitor în acelaşi timp, iar eu mă simt trist, jalnic de trist, mai ales la gândul că trebuie să mă întorc acasă, acolo unde sunt aşteptat de ceea ce, din păcate, Dumnezeu a uitat să stârpească: monotonia exasperantă şi morocănoasă a căsătoriei.

Ajuns acasă mă spăl de trei ori pe dinți în mai puțin de-o oră, nu-mi iau în seamă nevasta care face curat în bucătărie bolborosind blesteme la adresa unui destin nefericit care poartă numele meu, mă schimb, îmi curăț şi-mi dau cu cremă pantofii pe care, fireşte, băiatul meu a vomitat, ies, urc într-un taxi şi cobor în dreptul magazinului unde urmează să dau un interviu

drains out of me, leaving room for a nagging flood of doubt. "I like your shirt" she adds as an afterthought "must have cost you a fortune."

"T'was a present…"

There's no further action afterwards, nor does anything else develop till the morning. I can't have sex with her because I'm embarrassed. The girl probably thinks I'm one of those creeps that don't brush their teeth for weeks on end. Had my own wife been there instead of her, I would have simply sneered at her — my wife is not worth the effort of brushing my teeth before I kiss her.

In the morning the girl greets me with a smile that manages to be both compassionate and disdainful at the same, and I feel low, desperately low, particularly as I realise I have to get back home where I'm awaited by what God has unfortunately forgotten to make a full end of: the gruellingly grumpy monotony of matrimony.

Once home I brush my teeth three times within the space of under one hour, I ignore my wife who's tidying up in the kitchen muttering curses against an ill-starred destiny going by my name, I change into a new suit, I clean and shine my shoes after my son, you've guessed, has been puking all over them, I leave the house, I get on a taxi and descend outside the store

pentru postul de administrator. Pe hol se află un tip bărbos, care afirmă că aşteaptă aici din aceleaşi motive ca şi mine. Deşi mi-e contracandidat, nu mă sfiesc să intru în vorbă cu el.

— Ai un curriculum vitae bun? mă interesez, cu oarece emoţii.

— Am fost administrator la un magazin de stat, spune. S-a desfiinţat.

— Postul?

— Magazinul. Au făcut o discotecă în loc.

— Alimentar? îl întreb.

— Cum adică?

— Ai lucrat în domeniul alimentar?

— Nu. La textile.

Mă liniştesc. La textile, ha! Am o experienţă superioară bărbosului, care nici măcar nu a lucrat în domeniu. Îl privesc cu un zâmbet relaxat şi îmi permit chiar puţină compătimire, mai ales când îl văd mototolind în mână o bască veche, ceea ce denotă emoţie şi modestie dusă până aproape de umilinţă. Oftez la rândul meu şi-mi spun că, deşi este nedrept, în anumite momente şansa nu le surâde unor oameni.

where I'm going to be interviewed for an administrative position. There's a bearded fellow waiting in the corridor who informs me he's come for the same reason as me. He's my competitor; still I don't hesitate to chat him up.

"Got a good CV?" I enquire, not without a trace of insecurity.

"I used to be the administrator of a state-run store" he says. "Didn't last long."

"The position?"

"Nah, the store. They changed it into a disco."

"Groceries?"

"Whadya mean?"

"Were you in the grocery business?"

"Nah, textiles."

I relax. Pshaw, textiles… My experience is superior to the one of the bearded fellow, who didn't even work in that line of business. I'm watching him with a breezy smile and go so far as to allow a touch of compassion, all the more so since I notice he's wringing an old beret in his hands, an act denotative of insecurity and humbleness verging on the abject. I respond with a sigh and remind myself that, though it's not fair, there are moments when chance does not smile on certain people.

— Vrei o gumă de mestecat? îl aud. E mentolată.

Simt instantaneu un val de căldură urcându-mi spre creştet, iar asta mă face să devin foarte iritat.

— De ce?! ţip la el şi îmi imaginez că emoţia mi se poate citi uşor pe faţă.

Omul pare consternat de reacţia mea, mă priveşte fix cîteva secunde, apoi întoarce capul, subit interesat de pereţii din jur.

— De ce-mi faci asta? insist, cu toate că întrebarea mea este oarecum lipsită de rost, răspunsul găsindu-se deja în bănuielile pe care le am.

— Ce-ţi fac, dom'le?! se apără bărbosul, privindu-mă nevinovat. Ţi-am oferit o gumă, din amabilitate...

— Din amabilitate, îl îngân eu, sigur că da, amabilitate... Îţi par prost?

El dă din cap a neştiinţă.

— Din amabilitate, auzi! nu mă las eu. De parcă aş crede! Mai bine spune-mi sincer: îmi miroase gura?

— Nu, dom'le, nu-ţi miroase.

— Atunci, de ce?

— Ţi-am spus...

"Want some gum?" he chimes in. "Mint flavoured."

I feel an instant heat wave rising to the top of my head and consequently become extremely irritated.

"Why?" I scream back, and imagine my emotions are pretty easy to read in my face.

The fellow appears to be filled with consternation at my outburst; he stares at me for a few seconds, then looks away, suddenly taking an interest in the walls around.

"Why have you done this to me?" I persist, though there's not much point to my query, the answer being already contained in my mounting suspicions.

"Done what?" the bearded fellow defends himself as he looks at me innocently, sort of. "I just offered you some gum as an act of kindness…"

"Kindness, indeed…" I mock him. "Sure thing… Kindness… What sort of creep do you take me for?"

He wags his head in feigned incomprehension.

"Kindness, is it? Hear, hear…" I press on. "As if I believed you. Why don't you tell me plainly? Say, do I have a bad breath?"

"No, you don't. You don't have a bad breath."

"Then why…?"

"I've just told you…"

Trece un timp în care îmi pun o mulțime de întrebări cu privire la sinceritatea celui de lângă mine.

— Poți să-mi dai, îl anunț la finele momentului de cugetare.

— Ce să-ți dau?

— Ce mi-ai oferit cu câteva clipe în urmă. O gumă de mestecat.

— Îmi pare rău, zice. E la mine în gură. Din reacția dumitale am înțeles că nu vrei.

Îi arunc o privire încruntată, blestemându-i perfidia, apoi mă ridic, mă reped spre uşă, ies şi alerg în căutarea unei tonete, sperând să găsesc ceva care să-mi împrospăteze respirația. Căutarea mea durează o vreme. Obosit şi transpirat, mă întorc după jumătate de oră la locul unde urmează să dau interviul, cu o bomboană mentolată în gură. Găsesc o femeie şi un bărbat care tocmai se pregătesc să încuie uşile magazinului.

—Ce se întâmplă? Aici urmează să aibă loc un interviu, spun, simțind că mă încearcă o serie de emoții, încă nedefinite.

—Tocmai s-a încheiat, domnule.

—Nu se poate ! exclam, iar ciuda îşi pune imediat amprenta pe tonul meu. Eu am venit pentru interviu, nu

There's a few moments' lapse during which I'm seriously questioning the sincerity of the fellow next to me.

"Okay, I'll have some" I inform him as I conclude my reflection.

"Have what?"

"What you've just offered me. Some gum."

"Oh that… Sorry" he says. "I've popped it into my own mouth. I gathered from your reaction you didn't want any."

I frown at him cursing his deviousness under my breath, jump to my feet, bolt for the door, rush out and hurry in search of a booth with the hope of finding something to freshen up my breath. My quest takes a while. Exhausted and drenched in sweat, I return half an hour later to where I'm supposed to be for that interview, sucking on a mint. I run into a man and a woman on the point of locking the door.

"What's this supposed to mean? There's going to be an interview here" I say as I experience a sequence of emotions I can't as yet put my finger on.

"The interview's over, sir."

"How come?" I snap, annoyance quick to tinge my tone. "I'm here for that interview, can't you see? Right here, in front of your eyes, it's the interview I've come for."

vedeți?! Sunt aici, în fața voastră, am venit pentru interviu!

—Ați întârziat, îmi zâmbeşte amabil femeia. Postul a fost deja acordat singurului candidat care s-a prezentat. Îmi pare rău. Oricum, să ştiți, noi apreciem foarte mult punctualitatea, mă informează ea.

Aş putea să-i explic, aş putea să țip la ea sau să o implor să-mi mai ofere o şansă. Dar îmi dau seama că n-ar fi prea încântată să mă asculte povestindu-i motivul întârzierii, încadrat în câteva scuze. Aşa că, deprimat, mă îndepărtez de cei doi, gândindu-mă deja la reproşurile soției, care va avea de comentat nopțile pierdute la poker cu prietenii —căci ea aşa ştie că-mi petrec nopțile în care nu sunt acasă. Îmi plâng de milă la gândul că voi fi nevoit să suport în continuare monotonia din familia mea, un şir de zile înghesuite într-o aşteptare fără iluzii, o soție care nu vorbeşte decât pentru a se certa, un copil care vomită insistent pe pantofii mei...

Urc într-un tramvai, căci lipsa de speranțe în ceea ce priveşte vreun loc de muncă îmi înfrânează comoditatea de a lua un taxi. O matahală amabilă mă abordează la un moment dat şi, afişând cu seninătate insigna de controlor, mă înştiințează că în tramvai se circulă pe bază de bilet. Când, în sfârşit, înțeleg ce vrea, o pojghiță rece de sudoare mi se aşterne

"You're late" the woman smiles on me with benevolence. "The position has already been given to the only applicant we had. Sorry about that. Besides, you should know we do appreciate punctuality" she informs me.

I could explain, I could yell at her or beg her for a second chance. Yet somehow I realise she wouldn't be too thrilled if I were to recount, to the standard accompaniment of apologies, the reason for my being late. So I move away from the two in utter dejection, rehearsing the stream of reproach I'm bound to get from my wife, who will object to the nights I spend playing poker with my friends — for that's how she thinks I'm spending my nights away from home. I groan with self pity at the thought that I'll have to put up once again with the monotony of my family — a long string of days compressed in hopeless waiting, a wife who only opens her mouth to argue, a child puking insistently all over my shoes…

I hop on a tram, since the bleak prospect presented by the job front prevails against my comfort-born urge of hailing a taxi. An amiable hulk approaches me at a point and, serenely flashing a controller badge, imparts to me the news that resorting to the services provided by the tram is subject to the prior purchase of a ticket. When I finally make sense of his

pe şira spinării, la gândul amenzii care va veni.

În timp ce omul scrie o chitanță, scot amărât din buzunar cele câteva bancnote rămase din teancul de zile negre al soției mele şi le întind spre controlor. El îmi zâmbeşte la fel de amabil şi dă din umăr a „Ce să-i faci, viața asta-i o curvă, iar dacă tu eşti nătărău, trebuie să te gândeşti întotdeauna că poate exista un nătărău mai şmecher, care îți face viața şi mai scârboasă".

Doamne, ce viață! Sunt deprimat. Un motiv suficient pentru a-mi petrece restul zilei într-o bodegă.

***

Îmi găsesc copilul cântând în fața televizorului, bătând inutil din palme şi învârtindu-se haotic, ceea ce mă face să constat, încă o dată, că e un idiot, fără speranțe de vindecare. Soția mea spală pe jos în bucătărie, acolo unde spăla şi dimineață, iar eu mă apropii şi o sărut dintr-o dezgustătoare obişnuință. Ea îmi întoarce plictisită sărutul, apoi îşi reia poziția de lucru, aşezându-şi (ca o impietate la adresa esteticului) fundul imens în fața mea — un gest belicos care are

gibberish, a sheet of ice-cold sweat drapes my spine in anticipation of the fine coming my way.

While the fellow is writing a chit, I miserably produce out of my pocket the few notes left from my wife's emergency wad and proffer them to the controller. He smiles on me with undaunted amiability and shrugs his shoulders as if to say "That's the way it is, mate, life's a bitch, and if you happen to be a jerk, you should always think there might be a smarter jerk around the corner, who's going to make life even more miserable for you."

God, what a life! I'm depressed. And that's reason enough for spending the rest of my day in a drinking hole.

***

I find my child crooning in front of the TV, clapping his hands without rhyme or reason and spinning chaotically, which brings me to the renewed conclusion that he's an idiot beyond any hope of recovery. My wife's scrubbing the kitchen floor, same location she was scrubbing in the morning, and I walk up to her to give her a kiss in keeping with a disgusting routine. She retaliates with a half-hearted kiss of her own before resuming her work stance, confronting me (in impious breech

legătură cu întârzierea de care mă fac vinovat încă de dimineață.

— Îmi pare rău, îi vorbesc pe un ton indiferent, lăsîndu-mi în acelaşi timp gândurile să facă o triere lentă a scuzelor folosite până acum. Eşti supărată pentru noaptea trecută, aşa-i?

Nu-mi răspunde.

— Am întârziat pentru că... Nu cred că te interesează. Am... am câştigat câteva mâini la poker.

— Cât? îi aud vocea anostă.

— Cât am câştigat? Păi, am câş... Ce dracu'?! N-are rost, spun, dând din mână a lehamite. Am pierdut totul spre dimineață.

— Economiile mele, aşa-i?

Nu simt nevoia să spun ceva.

— Aşa-i, om de nimic ce eşti?! insistă ridicând tonul, întorcându-se spre mine şi fixându-mă cu privirea, sperând inutil ca gestul ei să mă afecteze. Nu vrei să-mi răspunzi?! Nici de dimineață n-ai catadicsit să-mi vorbeşti, spune, după o pauză care nu face decât să-mi sporească nepăsarea. Te-ai simțit vinovat?

of all aesthetic standards) with her immense posterior — a mute battle cry not entirely unrelated to the belated homecoming that has been laid to my charge since morning.

"Sorry" I address her in an indifferent tone, simultaneously allowing my thoughts to sort in slow motion through the excuses I've been resorting to on former occasions. You're angry about last night, is that it?

She doesn't reply.

"Well, I came home late because… I don't think you'll be interested. Well, I… I won a few hands at poker."

"How much?" I hear her bland voice say.

"How much I won, d'you mean? Well, I won… Hell! What's the use," I say, waving off the whole matter. "I lost it all towards morning, anyway."

"My savings, that right?"

I don't feel like saying anything at all.

"That right, you bum?" she pursues the matter somewhat raising her voice, turning to face me and staring me in the eye, in the vain hope that her gesture makes an impression on me. "So you won't answer… You wouldn't talk to me in the morning either" she resumes after a break whose only effect was to increase my indifference. "You were feeling guilty, I suppose."

— Vinovat?! mă arăt mirat, permiţându-mi în acelaşi timp un zâmbet dispreţuitor.

Ea pufneşte a mânie — un fel de grohăit ce poartă în el urme vagi de inteligenţă.

— Măcar de-ai fi fost la poker în noaptea asta! Dar n-ai fost! trage o concluzie hotărâtă, iar eu nu fac vreun efort pentru a mă apăra.

Cum discuţia nu aduce nimic interesant, nu-mi rămâne altceva de făcut decât să oftez profund, să părăsesc încăperea şi să mă aşez pe un pat, sperând să fiu lăsat în pace.

— Copilul a vomitat toată ziua, îmi spulberă ea iluzia liniştii, nici bani de medicamente n-am, iar tu nu eşti bun decât să-ţi pierzi timpul, să cheltui banii şi... O, Doamne, de ce dracu' am făcut prostia să mă mărit cu tine?! Au fost pretendenţi la mâna mea care acum sunt milionari, auzi?! Nu milionari, ci miliardari!

Ea ţipă de acolo, din bucătărie şi în scurt timp o aud plângând, un alt tertip inutil, care nu-mi mai poate provoca altceva în afară de silă. Copilul continuă să bată din palme, scuipând acum spre tavan şi repezindu-se să prindă câteva dintre picăturile de salivă ce se împrăştie prin cameră. În curând va vomita. Eu îl studiez cu un fel de curiozitate,

"Guilty?" I feign surprise, at the same time indulging in a superior smile.

She gives an angry snort –a pig-like sound, sort of, vaguely reminiscent of intelligent life.

"If only you'd been playing poker last night. But that's not what you did" she concludes resolutely, and I make no effort whatsoever to justify myself.

As the discussion fails to take an interesting course, all I have left to do is heave a deep breath, leave the room and ease myself on to a bed, hoping to be left alone.

"The child's been puking all day" she shatters whatever hopes of peace I might have entertained, "There's not even enough money for medicine, and all you're good for is waste your time, spend like crazy and… O God, why the hell was I such a nitwit as to marry you? There were people asking for my hand who are millionaires today, d'you hear that? And not just millionaires — billionaires!"

She's screaming from out there in the kitchen and soon I can hear her crying — another useless stratagem, no longer able to move me to anything else but nausea. The child goes on clapping his hands, now he's started spitting toward the ceiling and rushes to catch some of the saliva droplets spreading throughout the room. He's going to puke any moment now. I'm

încercând să nu mă las cuprins de scârbă.

— Copilul e un idiot, spun. Apoi mă întorc pe cealaltă parte, închizând ochii. Te-ar fi părăsit miliardarii tăi, adaug în şoaptă, dacă le făceai aşa un copil idiot.

Nu ştiu cât timp dorm, de fapt nici nu sunt sigur că am adormit. Ştiu doar că la un anumit moment mă hotărăsc să caut un alt loc de muncă. Citesc febril toate anunțurile din ziar care oferă servicii şi găsesc unul deosebit de convenabil, unul care mi se potriveşte foarte bine.

La ora fixată mă prezint în fața clădirii în care voi susține acest interviu, proaspăt, îmbrăcat la patru ace, cu o figură surâzătoare şi, pentru siguranță, cu două lame de gumă mentolată în gură.

Sunt invitat înăuntru unde, de la un birou, o femeie aflată la o vârstă considerabilă, cu ochelarii aşezați intenționat la nivelul nărilor pe nas, mă priveşte de sus până jos, meditativ. Apoi îmi arată un fotoliu şi mă sfătuieşte să mă aşez.

Termină de citit scurta prezentare pe care mi-am făcut-o, fără să lase să se observe pe chipul ei vreun indiciu cu privire la părerile pe care şi le-a format.

— N-ai scris niciun fel de moto, remarcă ea cu o voce pițigăiată, nesuferită, o voce care mi se pare teribil de familiară.

studying him with a feeling akin to curiosity, fighting down my own queasiness.

“This child’s an idiot” I say. Then I roll over, close my eyes. “Your billionaires would have left you” I add in a whisper “if you’d made them such an idiot child.”

I don’t know how long I’ve been asleep, I’m not even sure I’ve fallen asleep at all. All I know is that at a certain point I resolve to go looking for another job. I feverishly give myself to reading all the job adds in the paper and I find a particularly attractive one, one which suits me ideally.

At the appointed time I stand outside the building where I’m going to be interviewed, radiating freshness, dressed to kill, with a beaming face and, just to be on the safe side, with two sticks of mint-flavoured chewing gum in my mouth.

I’m invited inside, where a woman of considerable age sitting behind a desk, her glasses perched on purpose on the tip of her nose, looks me up and down with a meditative air. Then she points to an armchair and instructs me to sit down.

She reads to the end the résumé I’ve prepared, without allowing her face to express any sign as to the conclusions she might have arrived at in the process.

“You’ve written no motto whatsoever” she remarks in a shrill, unnerving voice, a voice sounding quite familiar to me.

— Nu înțeleg.

— Nu ştii ce-nseamnă moto? se minunează scârbită. Ha!

Încerc să spun un gâtuit „Ba da“, dar ea mă opreşte, cu un gest hotărât al mâinii. Apoi, după ce se mai zgâieşte un timp în foaia cu datele mele personale, continuă:

— Ai, nu zic nu, o experiență bună. Da' n-ai scris nicio zicală, ceva care să te reprezinte, un fel de aforism sau lege ideatică după care te conduci... Şi completează, a-toate-ştiutoare : asta înseamnă moto. Te rog să te gândeşti la o chestie dintr-asta, ceva...

— Acum? întreb, mirându-mă de asemenea pretenție, realizând în acelaşi timp că vocea ei este groaznic de asemănătoare cu cea a soției mele.

— Da' când? răspunde sec.

Se înghesuie în memoria mea o sumedenie de expresii celebre, de la *Acvila non capit muscam* şi *Hannibal ante portas* până la legile lui Murphy, dar nu găsesc nimic mulțumitor, nimic care să-mi dezvăluie profunzimea. Îmi vine în minte o

"I'm afraid I don't get you."

"You don't know what a motto's supposed to be?" she retorts in disgusted bewilderment. "Pshaw!"

I try my best to mutter a feeble "Oh, but I do" when she signals me to stop wit a resolute wave of her hand. Then, after continuing to peer for a while at the sheet containing my personal data, she resumes:

"You've got the experience it takes, can't argue about that. Still, there's no adage you've written, something to represent you, an aphorism, like, or some governing principle by which you're guiding yourself…" And she finishes off in a knowledgeable manner: "That's what a motto is supposed to mean. Please, do think of something along these lines, anything…"

"Now?" I ask puzzling over her strange request, at the same time realising her voice is terribly similar to my wife's.

"When else?" she replies dryly.

My memory is instantly bursting with countless famous phrases, from *Aquila non capit muscam* and *Hannibal ante portas* to Murphy's laws, yet I can't find anything adequate enough, nothing at all to reveal the depth of my insight. A poem comes to my mind, still there's not one line I can remember clearly.

poezie, însă nu-mi amintesc niciun vers cu claritate.

— Hai, te-ai gândit? îşi pierde răbdarea doamna de la birou.

— Stau şi-i privesc pe nenăscuţii câini pe nenăscuţii oameni cum îi muşcă, spun pe un ton coborât, după câteva momente de ezitare.

Ea are o privire perplexă, aruncată peste ochelarii inutili în acel moment.

— Ce câini, eşti prost?! Ce câini? Ce-i asta?

— Un poet, cred. Nu-mi aduc aminte prea bine versurile, dar ăsta-i motoul meu.

— Aha, se dumireşte ea, neuitând să mă fixeze cu privirea. Îţi miroase de obicei respiraţia? mă întreabă neaşteptat, după o scurtă pauză.

Din nou mă cuprind emoţiile. Modul ei direct de abordare reuşeşte să mă intimideze, mai ales că mi-e greu să dau un răspuns precis.

— Nu... Cel puţin, nu cred. Am două gume de mestecat în gură. Adică... nu ştiu. Îmi miroase respiraţia, doamnă?

"Okay, you have it now?" The lady behind the desk loses her patience.

"I sit and watch the dogs as yet unborn as they are biting men as yet unborn" I say in a low tone, after hesitating for a few moments.

She casts me a perplexed look over the rim of her glasses rendered useless for the moment.

"What dogs are those? Are you dumb or something? What dogs do you mean? What's all that about?"

"Some poet, I believe. Can't remember too well how the poem goes, but that's my motto."

"Okay, then" the penny seems to drop while she never forgets for a moment to stare me in the eye. "Do you usually have a bad breath?" she suddenly asks, out of the blue, after a short break.

Once again I'm overtaken by nervousness. Her direct approach has an intimidating effect on me, all the more so since I find it hard to give her a clear answer.

"No… At least I don't think I have a bad breath. I've got two sticks of gum in my mouth. I mean… I don't know. Does my breath really smell, Madam?"

"Why did you buy that gum?"

— De ce ți-ai cumpărat gumă?

Întrebarea nu poate primi niciun răspuns concret, pentru că orice răspuns ar fi în dezavantajul meu.

— Nu ştiu, spun chinuit.

— Nu ştii?! ridică ea vocea, aruncându-mi o privire urâtă.

— Îmi pare rău, nu ştiu.

— Nu te angajez, mă anunță cu o expresie impasibilă pe chip.

Momentul este dificil, dar eu mai păstrez câteva speranțe.

— Din ce motive? încerc să mă lămuresc.

— Pentru că eşti prost.

— Nu sunt. Zău că nu sunt!

— Atunci nu te angajez pentru că îți miroase respirația.

— Nu se poate! Am două gume de mestecat în gură!

— Tocmai. Ai două gume de mestecat în gură. De ce le-ai luat?

Îmi dau seama că nu se mai poate face nimic.

— Nu gura îmi miroase, babă! Miros eu a nevastă şi a copil dezaxat.

The question is not of the type one can answer concretely, as whatever way one might answer it, it would turn to one's disadvantage.

"I don't know" I reply abjectly.

"You don't know?" she raises her voice regarding me with mean looks.

"I'm sorry. I don't know."

"I'm not hiring you" she lets me know, an impassible look in her eyes.

The moment is difficult enough, yet I'm still clinging to the ghost of a hope.

"What are your reasons for it?" I'm trying to find out.

"'Cause you're dumb."

"I'm not. I promise you I'm not."

"Okay. Then I don't hire you because your breath smells."

"That can't be. I've got two chewing-gum sticks in my mouth."

"Exactly. You've got two chewing-gum sticks in your mouth. Why is that?"

I realise there's nothing more I can do.

"That's not my breath smelling, old hag. That's me giving off the smell of a raving wife and child."

Bătrâna se transformă pe neaşteptate într-un filosof caraghios, senil, în vârstă de o sută de ani, cu ochii sclipitori şi asimetrici, care suge cu voluptate dintr-o sticlă de votcă.

— Cum ai putut fi atât de idiot, îmi spune, oprindu-se din băut, încât să te însori? Căsătoria e ca o gumă de mestecat: îţi place o vreme, apoi îşi pierde gustul. Vezi, dacă te-ai însurat?! Se întinde ca o gumă de mestecat şi nu se mai termină. Nu se mai termină... Prostule!

Moşneagul pare mulţumit de imaginea metaforică pe care a creat-o, începe să râdă zgomotos, răguşit, tuşeşte şi inundă biroul cu un litru de votcă ţâşnit dizgraţios din gura sa.

Momentul se termină când soţia mea mă strigă, iar eu mă trezesc din somn. Constat că totul e ca înainte, îmi amintesc că am venit acasă după amenda primită pe tramvai, că m-am aşezat obosit în pat...

— E gata masa, îmi spune nevasta.

Mă aşez la masă, îmi mângâi pe cap copilul, el vomită pe piciorul meu, soţia mea îl şterge în tăcere, totul reintră în normalitate.

— Poate ar trebui să-l consulte un alt medic, îmi exprim eu

Without warning the old woman changes into a senile, laughable philosopher, one hundred years old, with beady asymmetrical eyes, voluptuously guzzling out of a bottle of vodka.

"How could you be such an idiot" he says interrupting his drinking "to get married? Marriage is like chewing gum: you enjoy it for a while, then the flavour goes out of it. See what getting married's done to you? Marriage just stretches on like chewing gum and never comes to an end. It never comes to an end, you fool…"

The old man appears satisfied with his metaphor, bursts into a fit of loud, hoarse laughter which changes into coughing and floods the desk with a litre of votka sickeningly gushing out of his mouth.

The moment comes to an abrupt end when my wife calls and I wake up out of my sleep. I realise everything is just as before, I remember coming back home after paying that fine in the tram, easing my tired body on to the bed…

"Dinner's ready" my wife tells me.

I sit down at the table, caress my child's hair, he pukes all over my foot, my wife cleans him up silently, everything's back to normal.

"Perhaps another doctor should see him" I volunteer,

părerea, arătând spre copil.

— Azi-noapte n-ai fost la poker, spune nevasta mea, făcându-se că n-aude.

Îmi dau seama că subiectul ăsta nu poate fi ocolit.

— Un prieten m-a invitat la el acasă, îi explic, oarecum nepăsător.

— Copilului îi dau medicamentele prescrise, mă linişteşte ea. Nu chiar toate medicamentele prescrise, pentru că nu am destui bani. Oricum, tusea convulsivă nu trece aşa uşor. E normal să vomite, mi-a spus medicul. La care prieten ai fost? nu uită să se intereseze.

— Nu-l cunoşti. Nu l-am adus niciodată acasă.

Trânteşte prosopul cu care tocmai se ştergea pe mâini şi începe să plângă.

— Ai o amantă? întreabă printre lacrimi.

— Nu am.

Ca de obicei mă priveşte fix câteva momente, timp în care lacrimile i se scurg în farfuria cu supă.

— Azi trebuia să mergi la un interviu, pentru o slujbă, nu-i aşa? Nu cred c-ai fost.

— Cum să nu merg?! Lasă-mă naibii în pace!

Deşi revolta mea este sinceră, vorbele nu sunt rostite pe un

pointing to the child.

"Last night you were not playing poker" my wife cuts in pretending to ignore my suggestion.

I somehow realise the topic cannot be avoided.

"A friend asked me over to his place" I explain, casually, sort of.

"I'm giving the child the prescribed medicine" she reassures me. "Well, not *all* the prescribed medicine, 'cause I haven't got enough money. Anyway, the whooping cough takes a long time to heal. It's normal for him to puke, doctor says. What friend asked you over?" she remembers to enquire.

"You don't know him. I've never brought him home."

She dumps the towel she's been drying her hands on and starts crying.

"Do you have a lover?" she asked between tears.

"I don't."

She stares me in the eye for a few moments, as she usually does, her tears dripping into the soup all the while.

"You were supposed to go for an interview today, to get a job, right? I don't believe you've been there."

"What do you mean I haven't been there? Leave me bloody alone."

Though my indignation is genuine, my words fail to

ton suficient de credibil.

— Ai o amantă, spune cu amărăciune.

— Nu-i adevărat! Futu-i mama ei de viață! înjur eu, cu gândul la noaptea trecută.

— Copilul e bolnav. Te rog să ai grijă cum vorbeşti. Medicul spune că are nevoie de linişte, ținând cont şi de celelalte probleme ale lui.

— Celelalte probleme? Cu ce afectează tusea măgărească deficiența lui mintală? mă mir. Mă rog, tu ştii mai bine. Auzi, tuse măgărească la paişpe ani! Futu-i mama ei de viață!

— Tu ai o amantă, nu renunță soția mea la obsesia cu care mă oboseşte. Azi te-ai spălat de trei ori pe dinți înainte de a pleca la aşa-zisul interviu. Când ai venit acasă, miroseai din nou a mentă. Cum crezi că suport eu asta?

— La aşa-zisul interviu?! Eşti vacă, femeie! Mă jur că am fost la interviu. Pentru asta mi-am şi cumpărat o bomboană, pentru ca să pot merge la interviu.

— De ce? Asta-i întrebarea, nu se lasă ea.

— De ce? De ce? De ce? o maimuțăreşte copilul.

Îl plesnesc cu dosul palmei şi încerc s-o lămuresc pe soția mea.

come out in a sufficiently credible tone.

"You do have a lover" she says miserably.

"That's not fuckin' true" I swear, remembering last night.

"The child's not well. Please watch your mouth, will you? The doctor says he needs peace and quiet considering the other problems he has."

"The other problems? How on earth does the whooping cough affect his mental deficiency? Well, I guess you're in a better position to know. Fancy that. Whooping fuckin' cough at fuckin' fourteen."

"You've got yourself a lover" my wife clings to the obsession she's vexing me with. Today you've been brushing your teeth three times before going to the so-called interview. When you came back home your breath smelt of mint once again. How do you expect me to take it?"

"The so-called interview? You're a bloody cow, woman. I swear to God I've been for that interview. That's why I got myself a mint, so that I could go for the interview."

"Why? That is the question" she pursues the matter.

"Why? Why? Why?" the child picks up in mocking tones.

I strike him with the flat of my hand and try to make things clear for my wife.

— N-am nicio amantă. Nu spun că n-aş vrea să am, spun că n-am! Dar mi-a fost teamă că-mi miroase gura. Ştii, trebuie să faci impresie bună la început, dacă vrei să fii angajat. Cât e ceasul?

Copilul plânge, tuşeşte şi vomită.

— De ce l-ai pocnit?! urlă soția la mine. Ştii cât e de sensibil!

— N-am vrut. Uneori mă enervez prea tare. Cât e ceasul?

— Eu te părăsesc, să ştii, mă amenință nevastă-mea.

— N-am eu norocul ăsta. Îmi spui naibii cât e ceasul?! urlu.

— Ce te interesează? Ți-e frică să nu întârzii la amantă?

— Vreau să mă spânzur, îi răspund calm. Ce zici? Vreau să ştiu ora la care mă spânzur.

Soția mea plânge şi mai tare, scuturându-se patetic, iar sânii imenşi îi atârnă dezgustător, într-o clătinare continuă sub bluza veche ce-i acoperă trupul.

— Azi te părăsesc, spune ea, după ce se satură de plâns.

"I have no lover. Mind you, I'm not saying I wouldn't like to have one, all I'm saying is I just haven't got one. But I was afraid I had bad breath. You know how it is; you have to make a good impression from the beginning if you want to get the job. What's the time?"

The child is crying, coughing, puking.

"Why did you hit him?" my wife's yelling at me. "You know how sensitive he is."

"I didn't mean to. Sometimes I just can't control myself. What's the time?"

"I'm leaving you, I am" my wife threatens.

"No such luck for me. Will you tell me what the time is, for Chrissake?" I yell.

"Why do you want to know? You're afraid you'll be late for your lover?"

"I want to hang myself" I answer her, composedly. "How 'bout that? I want to know the exact hour when I'll be hanging myself."

My wife succumbs to even more intense fits of crying, her body shaking pathetically while her oversized breasts hang unappetisingly, constantly quaking under the old blouse covering her torso.

"I'm leaving you today" she says after crying her fill. "I

Nu mai pot. Bani nu aduci în casă, mai mult, cheltui toți banii strânşi de mine. Copilul e handicapat, iar tu îl loveşti...

— Îmi pare rău că l-am lovit, nu pricepi?!

— În plus, continuă ea fără să-mi ia în seamă intervenția, ai început să te speli pe dinți de trei ori pe zi, mesteci gumă mentolată... Ai o amantă, e clar. În revistă scrie că, dacă bărbatul se îngrijeşte excesiv de sine, are o amantă. Eu te părăsesc!

— În care revistă?

— Ce revistă?

— Ce revistă e aia în care scrie că bărbatul… Lua-te-ar naiba, femeie!

Mă ridic de pe scaun şi, cu un gest pe care nu încerc să-l controlez, arunc aiurea farfuria din fața mea. Supa se întinde pe unul dintre pereții bucătăriei, lăsând o urmă maronie peste care se preling câțiva tăiței, o urmă dizgrațioasă. Fără să mai spun vreo vorbă, ies din casă în papuci, pentru că pantofii sunt murdari, ca de obicei. Fac câțiva paşi pe hol, mă răzgândesc brusc, intru, îl pocnesc pe băiat şi urlu:

— Nu mai vomita pe pantofii mei, auzi?! Nu mai suport!

can't go on like this. You bring no money home and, what's more, you're spending all the money I save. The child's retarded and you go and hit him…"

"I'm sorry I've hit him. Can't you understand that?"

"And on top of it all" she goes on ignoring my intervention "you've started brushing your teeth three times a day, chewing mint-flavoured gum… You have a lover, that's obvious. I've read in the magazine that if the man takes excessive care of himself, that means he has a lover. I'm leaving you."

"What magazine should that be?"

"Magazine?"

"The magazine writing that sort of crap about men… Aw, fuck you, woman."

I rise from my chair and with a gesture I'm not even trying to control, I throw the plate in front of me at random. The soup soaks into one of the kitchen walls, leaving a brownish stain with the odd noodle sliding across it — not a pretty sight. Without a word, I leave the house in my sleepers since my shoes are covered in puke once again. I take a few steps down the corridor, change my mind abruptly, go back into the house, have a swipe at the boy and yell at the top of my voice:

"Stop puking all over my shoes, get it? I can't take that

Ies din nou, mă plimb nervos prin fața blocului, fumez o țigară, deplâng încă o dată mizeria de care sunt înconjurat... După câteva minute urc scările pentru a mă întoarce în casă. Însă, la primul etaj, o țigancă, cu o pungă de semințe în mână, îmi vorbeşte printre dinții înnegriți, invitându-mă să cumpăr de la ea.

— Nu-mi plac semințele, spun şi încerc s-o ocolesc.

— Atunci, insistă țiganca, poate doreşti un pachet de gumă de mestecat, domnu'.

O prind de păr şi-i trântesc cu patimă un pumn în figură. Ea urlă şi se rostogoleşte pe scări. Uşile de la două apartamente se deschid, iar vecinii mei se arată foarte impacientați. Unul coboară şi mă înştiințează că am omorât-o pe țigancă, iar eu încep să râd.

— Aşa-i trebuie! De-acum încolo să-şi vândă guma de mestecat în altă parte.

În scurt timp, alertați de vecini, apar doi polițişti, iritați şi plictisiți în acelaşi timp, care încearcă să-mi pună cătuşele. Soția mea plânge, eu îi înjur senin pe oamenii legii, iar copilul meu de paişpe ani sare în mijlocul sufrageriei, la fel de stupid ca

anymore."

I get out again, I pace nervously the pavement outside our block of flats, I smoke a cigarette and deplore once again the squalor surrounding me… A few minutes later I'm climbing the stairs back into my flat. As it happens, on the first landing there's a Gypsy woman carrying a bag of sunflower seed, who addresses me through her discoloured teeth plying her merchandise.

"I don't like sunflower seed" I say as I'm trying to make my way past her.

"Then, mister," the Gypsy woman insists "p'raps you'd like a package of chewing gum."

I grab her hair and swing wildly at her face. She's bleating as she rolls down the stairs. The doors of two of the flats burst open and my neighbours appear quite nervous. One of them walks to the bottom of the stairs and informs me I've killed the Gypsy woman, whereupon I start laughing.

"Serves her right, too. From now on she should be selling her chewing gum elsewhere."

Soon after that, in response to my neighbours' call, two policemen enter the scene and try to handcuff me with a mixture of irritation and boredom. My wife is crying while I'm serenely abusing the law enforcers and my fourteen-year-old child is

întotdeauna, bate din palme şi încearcă să cânte ceva:

— Un elefant, un elefant...

Se întrerupe, ezită câteva secunde, aşteptând să-şi amintească urmarea, caută din priviri cel mai apropiat perete, dă de două ori cu capul în el, apoi hohoteşte fericit şi reîncepe să dea din palme.

— Un elefant se legăna pe o pânză de...

Se opreşte brusc, tuşeşte, se apropie şi vomită pe piciorul unui poliţist.

hopping in the middle of the dining room, as idiotic as ever, clapping his hands and trying to sing some song:

"One elephant, one elephant…"

He stops abruptly, hesitates for a few seconds trying to remember how it goes on, looks for the nearest wall, bangs his head against it two times in succession, then starts howling with mirth and resumes clapping his hands.

"One elephant swinging alone on a flimsy spider…"

He breaks his song, starts coughing, comes closer and pukes all over a policeman's foot.

[Translated into English by Florin Bican]





Dan Mircea Cipariu

Bunjee jumping

din ce în ce mai mult în propria mea viață
viața între codul de bare
cartela sim
telecomanda cu veşti apocaliptice şi pornografii insuportabile

viața între mai multe echipe de filmare
între mai multe clipuri despre viitorul care sună întotdeauna bine

viața între calupuri de publicitate şi sondaje despre cum pot obține europenii
orgasmul cosmic şi o monedă unică tot mai profitabilă

trăiesc din ce în ce mai mult în propria mea viață
într-o țară interioară
în care aşteptarea şi singurătatea îmi dau binețe

Bunjee jumping

Increasingly there's more in my life
A life between barcode
SIM
Remote with apocalyptic news and dire pornographers

life among multiple camera teams
between several videos about a future that all sounds good

blocks of life between advertising and surveys on how
Europeans can achieve
the cosmic orgasm and a more profitable single currency

living ever more my own life
inside an inland country
where in waiting and loneliness I see greetings

sper să ajung şi eu pe Himalaya şi să scriu:
„Viața n-are rost cu Coca-Cola!"

from where I hope to reach the Himalayas and write:
'Life is no good with Coca-Cola!'

[Tranlsated by Jon a'Beckett]





Raluca Rodica Rațiu

A Story within A Story



Did you see that old tree,
That stands near the small river,
Seems like he's used to see
The moon that is dressed-up in silver.

He keeps all the secrets of this land,
And only he knows how many times,
Saw the people of the village stand,
And throw in the river a little dime.

But not only that he saw them wishing,
He could even read their minds,
From old Joseph that wished to go fishing,
Till Mary that wished to know the mankind's.

That tree must be hiding a lot of great stories
Of princesses and knights that have come,

To make bonds for life, to plan glories,
Maybe one day I can make him tell some…

[Written in English]



Bogdan Suceavă

Să auzi forma unei tobe

Vei rămâne cu un sentiment bizar, dar nu vei avea nicio îndoială asupra acurateței istoriei atunci când îți voi povesti despre toate personajele ciudate pe care le-am întâlnit prin Bucureşti, fie de-aş aminti numai de Jack, tipul care purta pe umăr un papagal şi-l aducea la Carul cu bere, strecurându-se prin mulțimea de pe Lipscani, țeapăn de parcă ar fi fost heraldul țarului, sau Waldo, tipul care rămăsese țicnit de-a binelea de pe urma spaimei pricinuite de un accident de tren ale cărui detalii nu le-am ştiut niciodată, şi care era atât de fascinat de şuruburi, fiare, lanțuri, unelte, pârghii, amplificatoare, scripeți şi ceasuri vechi, încât amicii râdeau de el zicându-i nu-i aşa, Waldo, că tu faci amor cu a ta motocicletă sau poate eşti foarte timid şi doar o iubeşti de la distanță, privind o pe furiş în garajul tău secret din Bucureştii Noi.

Fireşte că cel mai alături de lume era Trixi, care la 15

Can One Hear the Shape of a Drum?

This may weird you out. Events like this don't happen every day, but there were odd characters running around Bucharest back then, and if you just kind of tune into their vibe, you'll get into the accuracy of this chunk of history, if you dope out what I'm laying down, because if I were only to clue you into Jack, who used to go around with a parrot on his shoulder. He would make his way through the crowd on Lipscani in Old Bucharest where everything was run down and there were beggarly houses with crumbling ironwork and all kinds of impromptu stores. Pacing the uncertain cobble stones, he would carry himself in a heraldic way past the dive selling grilled meat and the pretzel seller, and he would arrive, bird on shoulder, like some kind falconer out of the middle ages at the vast, Germanic, carved and gilded hall of the Beer Wagon. And then there was Waldo, who had a secret

ani contractase în forma cea mai insistentă ideea că trebuie să-şi pună capăt zilelor. Pe vremea aceea era licean la Caragiale, se trezea urlând la mijlocul orei şi vroia să se sinucidă chiar atunci, pe loc. Avea o voce stridentă, răguşită, de fiară cu venele deschise: îți dădea fiori. Întâia dată s-a izbit cu capul de cuierul metalic de şase ori şi a leşinat după ce şi-a provocat numai leziuni superficiale, iar a doua oară a coborât pe scara principală, a încălecat balustrada deasupra unui hău de zece metri şi, urlând, a rămas suspendat ca un pendul de grilajul de fier din dreptul primului etaj. Au negociat cu el vreme îndelungată, aproape jumătate de ceas, rugându-l să nu dea drumul grilajului, să ridice piciorul şi să se urce la loc pe palier. Cu spume la gură, el argumenta de ce nu, de ce totul devenise insuportabil, de ce zgomotele pe care le auzea năluceau intensități insurmontabile, făcând inaudibil fluxul natural al vieții. Mă rog, nu spunea chiar aşa, dar urletele lui articulau acea coerență care ducea exact acolo, către acel ultim şi bine motivat nu. Când şi-a dat drumul de sus a făcut aşa încât, răsucindu-se, nu a căzut în casa scărilor până la subsol, ci s-a întins pe spate, pe treptele dintre parter şi primul etaj. Doar fracturi. Vara aceea avea să reuşească, mult mai puțin spectaculos şi violent, înghițind parte din conținutul unei lădițe cu cuie, dincolo de limitele oricărui record.

garage in New Bucharest, that communist-built zone to the north of the city. All we knew was, the guy wigged out after a train accident, and even though none of us ever copped to the details, the scare left him all fixated on screws, metal doodads, chains, tools, levers, volumetric amplifiers, pulleys and busted clockwork. The whole thing turned into a running gag where his biker buds used to needle him, like hey Waldo, isn't it true you do it with your bike? Or maybe you're the shy type and only love her from afar, kind of takin' the odd squint on the sly out at the garage.

In some way Trixi was closest to this world. At the age of fifteen, he came down with the irresistible idea that he should just put an end to his days. He was a student at Caragiale High back then, and he'd find himself howling in the middle of class. He'd come out with the hoarse strident cry of an animal with its veins slashed. Then right away—*Bam*—he'd get the urge to commit suicide on the spot. The first time he pounded his head six times on the metal hooks of the coat rack and fainted after inducing only superficial wounds, but the second time he climbed up the main staircase, mounted the balustrade above a ten meter drop, and stayed there howling, suspended like a pendulum from the iron grill work right above the first floor. They negotiated with him a long

Dar nu cred că vreunul dintre aceste personaje cu totul aparte era la fel de interesant ca bătrânul al cărui al doilea nume era Sfântul Petru, pe care l am văzut întâia dată la Piața Romană, în vara lui 1988, purtând un sacou jerpelit, cu buzunarele lărgite, rupte şi doldora de cărți, cărând în mizere pungi de un leu tot felul de terfeloage desfoliate, tratate mirabile, manuale sau ediții apocrife ale Filocaliei.

Imaginează-ți cel mai paşnic personaj din lume, un bătrân hrănindu-se numai cu pâine goală (o începea de dimineață, la prima oră, şi către seară ajungea cu molfăitul cam la trei sferturi şi asta îi era tot), petrecându-şi tot timpul fie la cursurile tehnice de la Arhitectură sau Politehnică, fie la Măgurele, la Fizică, fie alteori la Matematică. Locuia undeva la intersecția străzii Polonă cu Mihai Eminescu, într-un cotlon mai de nimeni ştiut, unde inițiații spuneau că s-ar afla, în condiții de subterană amintind de adăposturile antiaeriene din vremea războiului, cea mai mare bibliotecă din Bucureşti, net superioară ca număr de volume Bibliotecii Academiei, care ar fi — după statistica Bibliotecii Congresului — a noua în lume. Imaginase un sistem propriu de fişare, clasificare, ordonare şi căutare a volumelor, aşa încât nu era niciodată pierdut în infernala lui bază de date. Era un spațiu aparte subsolul acela, cu ample ramificații către canalizare, iar fiecare cotlon era

time, almost half an hour. The director kept begging him not to let go of the grill, to lift his leg and climb back to a place on the landing. Trixi wasn't having it, and foaming at the mouth, he got into arguments about '**No**, why not,' about how everything had become unbearable, about how he was hallucinating noises to the point of unbearable intensity so that he couldn't hear the natural flow of life. Whatever. He didn't say exactly that, but his shrieks perfectly articulated a construction that led straight to a final, well-motivated **no**. When he let go from above he somehow managed to wriggle in space so that he didn't fall down the stairwell to the basement. He wound up flat on his back, on the steps between the ground floor and the first flight up. Fractures only. That summer he would succeed (less spectacularly and violently), in breaking all records by swallowing the better part of a small box of nails. Only, none of these off-the-wall characters had a patch on the old man.

The book collector had the unbelievable name of St. Peter. That first time, I caught sight of him in the summer of '88, he had taken up a post in Roman Square. He wore a threadbare jacket. His shot-to-hell pockets exuded books. Schlepping those miserable bags one buys for small change, he would drag literary junk around town—registers without

umplut cu dosare, volume fără coperți, fotocopii, ediții uitate, toate semnate de mulți, foarte mulți autori obscuri de care nimeni nu auzise vreodată, ca şi cum biblioteca lui s-ar fi format ca o alternativă plauzibilă la întregul univers. Spațiul acela era laborator şi sală de lectură (tu l-ai fi găsit prea puțin confortabil, dar pentru el nu conta), lăcaş de meditație şi sală de rugăciune cu pereții acoperiți, acolo unde nu erau rafturi, de icoane. Teoria lui se baza în principal pe o consecință de bun simț la una dintre ecuațiile lui Lorentz, o speculație mai degrabă elementară, un raționament de tipul: când v, viteza particulei, este mai mare decât c, viteza luminii, raportul v/c depăşeşte 1, obligând cantitatea de sub un anumit radical să fie negativă, ceea ce i-a condus pe fizicieni de aproape un veac la concluzia că nicio particulă n-ar putea călători cu o viteză superioară celei a luminii. Sfântul Petru credea altfel: că acest termen negativ de sub radical era perfect acceptabil, iar numitorul complex care ar rezulta nu mai reprezintă materia aşa cum o ştim noi (nu e nici antimaterie, pentru că nu dă cu minus, spunea el), ci materie angelică. Observația lui se baza pe o intuiție genială, susținută de următoarea imagine: închipuieşte-ți că ai călători în spațiul cosmic cu viteză crescândă. La 1000 km/h se va păstra masa inițială, după cum şi la 1000 km/sec masa va rămâne aceeaşi. Pe măsură ce viteza

leaves, fantastic tractates, manuals or apocryphal editions of *Religious Writings* by hermits, monks and clerics of the Orthodox Church.

The most pacific cat in the world, the man lived by bread alone. He began with a bare loaf first thing in the morning and by evening he'd have mumbled his way through about three quarters. And all that time he would take up a post outside the school of Architecture or the Polytechnic University, or out north at the Physics Department at Măgurele, or he'd wind up at the Department of Mathematics in the heart of town. For himself, he lived somewhere in the center, at the intersection of Polonă and Mihai Eminescu. He had a secret den known to practically no one, in which, initiates said, he harbored the largest library in Bucharest. The number of books clearly surpassed that of the Romanian Academy library, which, going by Library of Congress stats, was supposed to be the ninth largest holding in the world, only that St. Peter kept his in subterranean conditions that made you think of anti-aircraft shelters during the war. So as to never get lost in the regular inferno of his own database, he'd worked out his own system of cataloging volumes, classifying, ordering and finding things after that. That basement was a place unto itself up to and including ample branching toward the sewer

se apropie de viteza luminii, masa va începe să crească, urmând ca exact atunci când atingi viteza c corpul să dispară din spațiul perceptibil (algebric, asta însemna împărțirea masei la un număr complex), şi numaidecât ce treci la o viteză superioară lui c să străluceşti în categoria angelicului.

Aceste concluzii nu erau prea departe de unele observații ale sfinților părinți, relative la omniprezența serafimilor. A călători cu o uriaşă viteză nu înseamnă oare a fi omniprezent? Nu era deloc departe cu această idee de teoria căderii lui Satan, căreia i s-ar putea astfel genera modelul matematic complet: o coborâre de la o viteză superioară lui c la o viteză „materială", urmată de urcarea la viteza inițială, mai mare decât c, de data asta pe baza unei altfel de surse de energie. Aici ar fi mai dificil de explicat. (Şi, oare, nu rezidă tocmai în asta cea mai adâncă taină a diavolului?)

Pentru referințe, data viitoare când parcurgeți Piața Universității, căutați atent pe zid, sub uriaşul înscris Monarhia Salvează România, şi veți găsi o suită de inegalități care, în notațiile clasice, demonstrează riguros ceea ce am amintit mai înainte. Sub demonstrație se află notat: Reciproca e adevărată? Dar nu ştiu la ce se referă întrebarea aceasta.

În seara zilei de 12 decembrie 1992, Sfântul Petru stătea lipit de zidul blocului cu nr. 153 de pe Calea Victoriei, cel unde

system. Over the course of a lifetime, St. Pete had crammed every nook with files, volumes without covers, photocopies, forgotten editions signed long ago, not to mention the large number of obscure authors no one ever heard of, and in that way his library seemed to form something like an alternate universe, somehow whole and plausible unto itself. That space was workroom and lecture hall, a site for meditation and prayer so that its walls were covered with icons in the spaces left between shelves.

The deal was, St. Pete had a theory based in principle on a common sense notion derived from one of Lorentz's equations—scientifically, a rather elementary speculation, an argument on the order of: when *v,* the speed of a particle is greater than *c,* the speed of light, the *v/c* ratio surpasses 1, forcing the quantity below a certain radical to be negative, a notion which had led physicists (for almost a century) to the conclusion that no particle could travel with a speed greater than light. St. P. thought otherwise: that this negative term below the radical was perfectly acceptable, while the complex denominator which would result no longer represented matter as we know it, nor was it anti-matter, either, in his book, because it didn't yield a negative number. Instead, all that yielded the denomination *angelic matter*. To get technical,

se află sediul trustului Expres, cenuşiii vânzători ai celor mai fascinante minciuni ale zilelor noastre. Seara aceea avea să inaugureze suita lui de experimente menite să demonstreze existența materiei angelice. Era de notorietate în întregul Bucureşti că blocul cu pricina avea fundațiile serios avariate de cutremurele din ultimii ani. Cândva se va prăbuşi, aşadar. Această prăbuşire nu trebuie imaginată altfel decât ca pe o repunere în mişcare a unui obiect aflat în repaos (Sfântul Petru mi a povestit asta), mişcare precedată de un şir de vibrații de rezonanță mai degrabă muzicală, anticipând dezastrul final. În seara aceea mi-a mărturisit că, încercând să asculte zidurile, nu aude nimic. Ulterior, se pare că a găsit o modalitate mai bună de a realiza Captarea Vibrațiilor, dar nu ştiu să îți povestesc nimic despre perioada misterioasă când a pus la cale filtrul de Captare absolută a Vibrațiilor, acel instrument miraculos care i-a permis să facă progresele despre care am auzit cu toții. Bazat pe acea procedură secretă, a prezis că pe 29 iunie 2005 imobilul respectiv se va prăbuşi dracului odată, nu din cauza unui seism, ci pentru că atunci muzica lui lăuntrică va ajunge la apogeu.

Problemă fundamentală în veacul al XVII-lea, Captarea Vibrațiilor are o îndelungată istorie. Imaginați-vă că putem auzi două tobe distincte, fără a le vedea. Problemă: s-ar putea

St. Pete's observation was based on a brilliant intuition, which you could say was sustained by the following image: imagine you have travelled in cosmic space at increasing speed. At 1000 kilometers per hour, initial mass will be preserved, and at 1000 kilometers per second mass will remain the same. In proportion as the speed gets close to the speed of light, the mass will begin to rise, from which it follows that exactly when you hit speed *c [the speed of light]* the body disappears from perceptible space. Algebraically, if you'll pardon my French, this implies the division of mass by a complex number, and only when you reach a speed higher than *c* will you flash into the category of the angelic.

These conclusions weren't too far from some observations of the holy fathers relative to the omnipresence of the seraphim. I mean, doesn't travelling at huge speed really imply being omnipresent? With this idea, the old guy wasn't at all far from the theory of Satan's fall, from which (to drop into French again) a complete mathematical model might be generated: a fall from a speed superior to *c* to a 'material' speed, followed by the increase to the initial speed, greater than *c*, this time on the basis of another kind of energy. Here things get tougher to explain. Only, when you think about it, doesn't the deep arcana of the devil reside precisely

oare determina forma unei tobe recurgând doar la analiza sunetului ei? Poți tu auzi forma unei tobe? În fapt, materia lasă urme perceptibile în întregul spațiu, cum un hoț nătâng amprente clare, şi tu vrei — citind aceste urme — să ghiceşti forma ce le-a lăsat. Ce vibrații lasă oare materia angelică? Sfântul Petru, căutând îngerii pierduți, nu ştia la ce să se aştepte. În corolar, imaginați-vă cât de totală ar fi o asemenea informație, pentru că Citirea Vibrațiilor ar aduce o mai bună descriere a Big Bang ului inițial, cel care mamă ne-a fost atât nouă, cât şi îngerilor.

Bătrânul a putut fi văzut săptămâni în şir în Piața Universității, purtând în brațe un fel de patefon cu pâlnia membranată, alimentat la o baterie de maşină pusă pe un cărucior de butelie pe care îl trăgea după el, aparat din care ieşeau mii de fire, unul dintre ele către casca uriaşă, ca de tanchist, pe care o purta peste părul vâlvoi. Ochii albaştri, mari, miopi priveau în gol şi nu auzeau ce îi spuneam noi, ceilalți, ca şi cum ar fi uitat cuvintele în banda normală şi s-ar fi mutat definitiv şi improbabil pe alte imateriale frecvențe.

O primă aplicație a fost anticiparea, cu precizie de nanosecundă, a mişcărilor tramvaielor 40 de-a lungul Bulevardului Basarabia. Asta a fost înainte de accidentul de tramvai de la Piața Sudului, pe care Sfântul Petru l-a prevăzut

in this?

Anyhow, for the sake of reference, next time you pass through University Square, look carefully under the wall, under the huge inscription *Monarchy – Saves – Romania*, and you'll find a suite of algebraic inequalities which, in classic notation, rigorously demonstrate what I've been using all this lingo to alluded to just now. Under the demonstration the following note will be found: *P.S.: Is the reciprocal true?* Naturally, I have no way of knowing to what this question refers. No matter.

On the evening of December 12, 1992, St. Peter had glued himself to the wall of Nr. 153 Calea Victoriei, the building that houses the seat of the *Express* press trust, those shadowy sellers of the most fascinating lies of our time. That evening he was about to inaugurate a train of experiments designed to demonstrate the existence of angelic matter. It was well-known all over Bucharest that the earthquakes in recent years had seriously damaged the foundation of the building in question, and the consequence was, one day or another it would all come tumbling down. This collapse, as the old man told me, should only be imagined as the putting back into motion of an object found in repose, the movement itself to be preceded by a series of vibrations of a somehow musical

cu o bună aproximare, căci l-am auzit cu toții atunci când a spus:

—Rețeaua de tramvaie a întregului Bucureşti e ca un filigran pe o uriaşă tobă, şi a intrat în deplină rezonanță cu vibrația lœssului din Câmpia Bărăganului. Se aude câmpia. Vârtejurile sunt posibile oricând.

Urmau cifrele.

Anomaliile cosmice se pot recepta la nivelul vibrațiilor în plin Bucureşti. Sfântul Petru regreta sincer înlăturarea de pe soclu a Lenin-ului atât de frumos vibrator din fața Casei Scânteii, care ar fi putut îngădui predicții spectaculoase la scara istoriei. Ceea ce ar fi putut spune el ar fi fost atât de clar, încât, amplificat de filtrul Sfântului Petru, ar fi fost ca şi cum Lenin însuşi ar fi fost viu, urcat pe soclu, şi ar fi strigat profeții. Fiecare dintre statuile din Herăstrău îşi vibra forma şi, întrucât chipul e oglinda spiritului, în amplificator el recepționa, în vecinătatea busturilor, versuri clasice şoptite în germană, laolaltă cu mârâieli cazone, savuroase înjurături în aromână sau o îngrozitoare tuse tuberculoasă ce mergea foarte armonios cu poezia, terține în italiană sau delicate graseieri cu accent normand. Totul îşi vibra forma. Casa Republicii vibra mormântul unui Bucureşti uitat şi îngropata senzualitate a cartierului Uranus, după cum şi Casa Vernescu, Hotelul

resonance, anticipatory to the final disaster. On that night, he confided in me that while listening to the walls, he didn't hear a goddamned thing. He later found a better mode of Vibration Capture, although I really can't tell you a thing about the mysterious period when he was planning the filter for the absolute Vibration Capture, a miraculous instrument that allowed him to make advances that I heard about along with everyone else. Based on that secret procedure, he foresaw that on June 29, 2005 the building in question would crash down like a bat out of hell, not as the result of seismic activity but because at that point its internal music would reach its apogee.

Right here, there's no way to avoid talking like a book. *Fundamental problem of the XVIIth Century*, the Capture of Vibrations has a long history. Imagine that we are able to hear two distinct drums without being able to see them. Problem: is it really possible to determine the shape of a drum having recourse only to the analysis of its sound? Can you hear the shape of a drum? The deal is, matter leaves perceptible traces in all of space, the way a moronic thief leaves distinct fingerprints—from which you, playing detective, want to divine the shape of what or who left them. What vibrations does angelic matter leave behind? Hey, when it came to looking for lost angels, St. Pete didn't know what to expect. By

Continental sau biserica Domnița Bălaşa aveau fiecare vibrații aparte, de cele mai multe ori în total dezacord cu situația prezentă a clădirii, ca şi cum zidurile respective ar fi căzut din propria lor realitate. Singurele lucruri absolut tăcute, grație formei lor, erau crucile de pe morminte. Ca şi cum nimic n-ar mai fi de spus, nimic de adăugat. Dar Sfântul Petru interpreta datele diferit: absența oscilațiilor nu însemna pentru el altceva decât transgresarea materiei întru angelic. Cu toții devenim după moarte materie angelică, iar sufletul părăseşte pământul, spre o destinație necunoscută, cu o viteză superioară lui c. Altfel, totul este vibrație. Râdea bătrânul ascultând, de la distanță, în mărginaşele cartiere ale Bucureştilor, vibrațiile atât de distincte ale dragostei. Aparatul i se perfecționase şi îşi sporise acuratețea atât de mult, încât putea doar să închidă ochii, satir bătrân, voyeur impenitent, şi vedea cu limpezime de oglindă magică trupurile amanților, mângâiere de mângâiere, apropiere de apropiere, murmur de murmur. Intimitatea ultimă a semnelor materiei.

În vara lui 1998 îşi luase obiceiul să adoarmă în Piața Universității, printre cei fără de adăpost. Acolo, zicea el, vibrează cel mai clar în liniştea nopții uriaşa tobă pe nume Bucureşti. Nici urmă până atunci de materie angelică. Începuse să bănuiască faptul că oscilațiile angelice ar putea

way of corollary, imagine how *total* such a piece of information would be, for the simple reason that the Reading of Vibrations would induce a better description of the initial Big Bang, which was mother to us all as well as the angels.

As time went by, the old man could be seen for weeks at a time hovering around University Square carrying a kind of gramophone in his arms. The gizmo had a funnel-like membrane fed by an automobile battery (set on a bottled gas trolley) which he dragged after him. The apparatus sprouted thousands of wires, some of them leading toward the huge helmet—like a tank driver's, more-or-less—that St. Pete wore over his disheveled hair. His big, myopic blue eyes goggled into space, and he didn't hear what people were saying to him, as if he'd simply forgotten words transmitted at the normal frequency and had definitively if improbably moved on to other, immaterial frequencies.

Getting down to brass tacks, a first application involved anticipating, precisely to the nanosecond, the movements of the number 40 trams along Basarabia Boulevard. That was before the tramway accident at Southern Square, which old St. Pete had foreseen with what they call a good approximation, considering that I and everybody else heard him when he said:

cădea în registrul imperceptibilului şi că proba esenţială ar putea să fie pentru totdeauna inaccesibilă.

Pe vremea aceea, Circul de Stat tocmai antrenase marele elefant alb indian, Jumbo, să cânte imnul naţional la tobe. Elefantul se urca pe patru tobe speciale, făurite la comandă din oţel înalt aliat, şi-şi mişca picioarele într un ritm de dans drăcesc, bizar woodoo adaptat situaţiei — al cărui rezultat final era totuşi un cântec. Uneori, paşii de dans trebuiau mascaţi în plin balans, ca să nu dea sunete în plus, şi atunci Jumbo călca toba pe vârfuri, silenţios. Partea aceasta îi fusese cel mai greu s-o înveţe. La fel de silenţios a evadat în seara aceea fierbinte de iulie şi, dansând în ritmul cu care interminabilele repetiţii îl obişnuiseră, a plecat prin oraş în căutarea răcoroasei jungle unde aerul vibrează cântarea marilor elefanţi albi. Sfântul Petru era treaz la acel ceas din noapte şi stătea întins pe spate în mijlocul Pieţei Universităţii, cu ochii la cerul înstelat, conectat la cele douăsprezece pâlnii membranate care permiteau Captarea maximului de Vibraţie din eter. Asculta de la simfonia astrelor până la ultimul tramvai rătăcit în noapte, de la poemul murmurat la urechea iubitei în apt. 27, Calea Dorobanţi nr. 172, până la cântecul beţivului dintr o baracă din Militari, auzind totul în afară de paşii înveliţi în pâslă ai celui mai uriaş pahiderm pe care l-a

'The whole Bucharest tramway network is like filigree on a huge drum, and it has now reached full resonance with the vibration of the loess of the Baragan Plain. You can hear the plain. Whirlwinds are possible any moment.' Figures followed.

Put it this way, cosmic anomalies may be received at the vibration level in the middle of Bucharest, and I can only say that St. Peter sincerely regretted the removal of the beautifully vibrating Lenin from his pedestal in front of Spark House, the formerly communist and monumental press building, because V.I.'s presence would have made for spectacular predictions on an historic scale. What Vladamir Ilich would have been able to say would have been so clear that, amplified by St Peter's filter, it would have been as if Lenin himself were in this life, mounted on the pedestal and spouting prophecies. And that's not all. St. Peter made it clear that each statue in Herăstrău Park was vibrating its own shape and, since the face mirrors the soul, in the vicinity of the Herăstrău busts, St. Peter's amplifier would go on picking up verses whispered in German, the growling of caissons, savory curses in the dialect known as Aromanian, or a frightful tubercular cough that chimed very harmoniously with the poetry, *terza rima* in Italian or delicate rolled r's in Norman accents. Everything

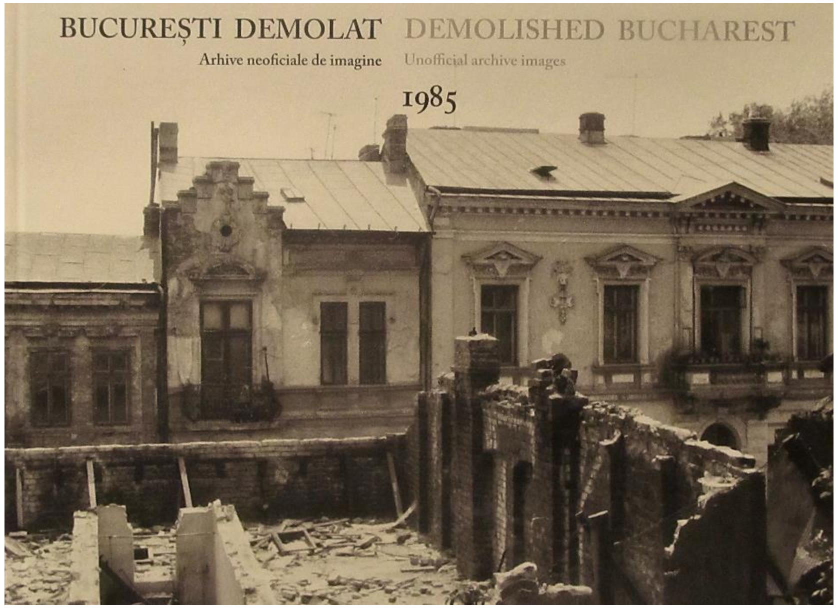
văzut vreodată Valahia, venind tot mai aproape.

La locul strivirii sale a avut loc un scurt pelerinaj, medic legist, polițiști, preot, echipajul morgii și când, în fine, ultimele sale rămășițe lumești au fost strânse, moartea păru mai degrabă o țintuire în lut, o fixare în țărână, o pironire a trupului cu sufletul deopotrivă de ceva static și inert decât o părăsire a pământului cu o viteză superioară lui c, cu atât mai mult cu cât există ființe vii, oricât de mici sau oricât de uriașe care, antrenate până la nebunie, pot imita tăcerea, tăcerea ultimă, cosmică, abisul, tăcerea unui fund de lac înghețat într-o noapte de decembrie.

was vibrating its own shape.

So now, Republic House, formerly the House of the People, was vibrating the entombment of a forgotten Bucharest and the sensuality of the Uranus District, destroyed to build that Soviet-style monolith, while Casa Vernescu, the Continental Hotel and Domnița Bălașa church all had their own separate vibrations, usually in complete disaccord with the building's present situation, as if the walls in question had fallen into their own reality. The only absolutely silent places, thanks to their form, were the crosses on the graves, as if there were nothing more to be said, nothing to be added. Only, St. Peter interpreted the data another way: for him the absence of oscillations meant nothing other than the transgression of the material into the angelic, eg.: we all turn into angelic matter after death while the soul abandons this earth for an unknown destination with a speed grater than *c*.

The rest is vibration. The old man went on laughing and listening to the distinct vibrations of love at a distance in the outer quarters of Bucharest. The apparatus had been perfected at this point, and its accuracy had increased so greatly that all the old satyr had to do was close his eyes, and the impenitent voyeur would see the lovers' bodies with clarity of a magic mirror, caress by caress, rub by rub, sigh by sigh. The final



intimacy of the signs of matter.

In the summer of 1993, he had taken his device to fall asleep among the homeless in University Square. Something there vibrates the great drum most clearly in the still of the night—Bucharest, to call it by name, he'd go on explaining in a poetic way. There'd been no trace of angelic matter till then, and St. Pete had begun to suppose that angelic oscillations might fall in the register of the imperceptible so that that the essential test might be forever out of range.

But to return to our sheep: at that time the State Circus had just trained the white Indian elephant Jumbo to play the national anthem on the drum. The elephant used to climb onto four special drums, forged to order of highly alloyed aluminum, and he'd move his feet in an infernal dance rhythm, a bizarre, voodoo adapted to the situation—whose final result was a piece of music, nevertheless. Sometimes the dance steps had to be masked in the middle of the balancing act in order not to make extra sounds, and then Jumbo used to tiptoe silently on the drum. It had been hardest for them to teach him that part. He nevertheless escaped just as silently one burning July night and, dancing in the rhythm he'd gotten used to during interminable rehearsals, he set out through the city in search of the cool jungle where the air vibrates the song



of the great white elephants. Stretched out on his back in the middle of University Square with his eyes on the starry sky connected to the twelve membraned funnels that allowed for the maximum Capture of Vibrations from the ether, St. Peter lay awake at that hour of the night. He would listen to the symphony of the stars as well as the last tram wandering in the night, and he'd hear everything from the poem murmured in the ear of a beloved woman in apartment 27, Calea Dorobanți nr. 172 to the song of the drunk in a hut somewhere in the Militari district, and that's how he went on listening to everything except the felt-padded steps of the hugest pachyderm ever seen in Walachia that were coming closer by the instant.

The place where he was crushed to death became the site of a short pilgrimage: coroner, police, priest, the team from the morgue, and when finally his last worldly remains were gathered up, his death resembled a riveting into clay. It was more a fixation in the dust of mortal remains or a crucifixion that welded body and soul together than it was a desertion of the earth with a speed superior to *c*, the more so given the existence of living beings, however small or huge who, trained to the point of madness, can imitate silence, the ultimate cosmic silence, the abyss, the silence of the bottom of a lake

iced-over on a December night.

[Rewritten in English by Jean Harris]



CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE PRESS
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Nick Drake

Ceauşescu's Daughter's Bedroom



Impossible but true;
I am insomniac
in the land of Nosferatu's
spooky dark,

in the silent penthouse
of the Undead;
in Ceausescu's daughter's
shrivelling cold bed.

Her parents were booed
to their rooftop helicopter
by the chanting crowd
in Revolution Square,

then shot by firing squad



on Christmas Day,
their absolute, iconic heads
shown on TV

abandoned here,
was she the teenage sacrifice
slaughtered by soldiers
for her father's sins,

her only defence
the innocent chocoholic
in the haunted palace
of *realpolitik*?

No one seems to know
the truth of her fate
and much less care. Snow
falls, and I speculate

in her dark chamber which contains
no personal possessions,
but stray bullet-hole burns
in the yellow curtains,



dusty official tomes,
a sixties sunken circle
of seats in crumbling foam,
and a swirly carpet from hell;

no water runs
in these taps at night,
petty tyranny's
B-movie set.

My head on her pillow,
I could almost
pity her,
spoiled ghost

stalking enraged
through the cold tower-blocks
to take her revenge
in bad dreams of sex;

who will not acquiesce
to the stake of light



driven for peace
through her ordinary heart.

Something creaks: the snow, a door
I switch on the lamp's
small pale against fear
of the dark and sleep;

but no one is there.

[Written in English]

Mike Ormsby

The Promised Land



'Your cousin worked for The Beatles?' My wife sounds sceptical. I don't blame her.

When I was a kid, my schoolmates never believed me either. Until the day I showed them a red gingham shirt with black buttons and a name tag in the collar: R. Starr. It was Ringo's. From their second US tour. How come? Simple. Ringo and my cousin Dave grew up together in the Dingle, working class lads. Not suburban like Lennon and McCartney. Dave wore the same size shirts, pants and shoes as Ringo. The Beatles moved to London. Dave followed. So there.

'Actually, he was my Mum's cousin. Anyway, what about this letter, is it a scam?'

I pass her the letter, from a lawyer in London, short and very sweet: David R. Mann has bequeathed you £10,000. Strange word, bequeathed. Nice of him to remember me. I'm trying to remember the last time we met. 1985? I was out of college, playing in a band, home to see Mum. Dave turns up and tells her pop music's a waste of time. Then he winks at me, the bugger.

Angela taps her thumbnail against her teeth, reading the letter for the third time. I watch and wait. She can usually smell a rat a mile off, like most Romanians, but right now, I reckon she's optimistic. I peer over her shoulder. 'By the way, how do you say bequeathed?'

'In Romanian?', says Angela.

'No, in Chinese.'



'In Romanian we say *moştenitor*. And if that's what this Dave fellow did, we're rich.'

'I'm rich, you mean. My cousin bequeathed me. He didn't bequeath you.'

Angela folds the letter and passes it back. 'As the Chinese say: not your cousin.'

I walk outside to our small balcony and watch hare-brained drivers razzing across the busy junction below. Rush hour in downtown Bucharest. Everyone's in a hurry to get home and watch telly. This city will turn you insane if you let it. I look towards the horizon, beyond the chimneys and office blocks. It's a clear evening and, in the distance, I can just make out the pale pink hills of Transylvania. Angela appears beside me. I wrap my arm around her shoulder.

'In the unlikely event that I decide to share my windfall, what shall we do with it?'

Angela points to Transylvania. 'Buy some land. Somewhere quiet. Build a house.'

She's telepathic, my wife.

***

We fly to London for Dave's cremation. We file into a chapel behind the other mourners, all dressed in black. Some of the older women wear sunglasses, like they are famous. Maybe they were, once upon a hippie. One guy wears Chelsea boots. The service is dignified, the casket rolls through velvet curtains into eternal fire and an old Beatles song plays on the speakers: I'll Be Back. We get drinks and snacks, afterwards. Some boring queen in a tartan waistcoat twirls an olive on a cocktail stick and tells me his dear friend Dave R. Mann worked in graphics, got his break designing the cover of Revolver. 'Which was designed by Klaus Voormann?' I reply.

He pokes his olive gobwards and, chewing loudly, says: 'Dave helped. The boys called him 'Dave-Our-Man'. He was from Liverpool you know, just like them.'

'You don't say.'

Mum tugs me aside, pushing at her hairdo.

'Be nice. Look who's here.'

She nods towards the door where a man with a tan is chatting away. His hair is the colour of beetroot. He looks like Paul McCartney.

When I fly home to Bucharest I've got some of Dave's ashes in a Ziploc bag in my pocket. Angela finds it all a bit ghastly. 'You're sick,' she says, browsing the in-flight magazine.



'When we buy our land,' I say, 'I'll sprinkle him, here, there and everywhere.'

***

The map of Transylvania is spread on our carpet. We're looking at names of towns and villages. Angela points and says: 'I hear the countryside around Bran is quite spectacular. If we lived there, friends would enjoy visiting – nice views and lots of history, you should read some.' I read history. Bran Castle belonged to Vlad Țepeș. He impaled Turks up the bum, by the thousand. Given the chance, I bet he would have impaled Bram Stoker too for writing 'Dracula'. Poor Vlad – from warrior prince to Hollywood creep. Then again, what a pain in the ass. Imagine having The Impaler as a neighbour, knocking to borrow sugar. What if he didn't give it back?

***

We take a slow train from Bucharest and spend a wet weekend tramping muddy paths in Transylvania with rain seeping down our scrawny necks. Angela was right – the countryside is

quite spectacular, when you can see it. The rest of the time the hills are draped in medieval fog.

The good news is plenty of local farmers have land to sell and they have erected wobbly wooden placards, daubed blood red with their phone numbers and prices — very eye-catching. The bad news is, when we phone them, they all want at least €35 per square metre, way over our budget.

A friendly farmer and his jolly fat wife run the guest house where we stay. Our guidebook described Casa Bilius as rustic and keen to promote eco-tourism. In other words, the duvet is too small; the wife probably recycled the other half. Nevertheless, the food is tasty and they have a big friendly dog, Boo-Boo, chained up. We take Boo-Boo for a walk. Farmer Petre cannot believe his eyes. The dog cannot believe its nose. We wander the hills, and pause at weatherbeaten placards, thumbing numbers. The landowners sound keen but the best plots cost a bomb and the cheap ones are poorly located. By noon on Sunday, we're heading back to Bucharest.



***

Next time we come to Transylvania, we march around stiff-legged in sturdy new walking boots. We've also brought waterproofs, telescopic sticks and gaiters. Farmer Petre looks vaguely amused and offers to sell us an isolated patch of land with water and electricity, €40 per meter.

'No thanks,' says Angela, stamping snow, 'We've called an agent in Braşov, he's coming to meet us, he knows some excellent plots.' Farmer Petre shrugs. I'll bet he does.

The agent is named Emil. He arrives in a car driven by someone else and wears suede shoes. We sign forms promising not to trick him and spend two days wading through snowdrifts.

'How about this?' says Emil, leading us to a plot that measures three meters wide by seventy meters long. Perfect for a bowling alley. Angela tells him we'll come back in spring.



'Good idea,' says Emil, blowing into his cupped hands, 'You can see the lambs.'

It sounds nice. But what we want to see is decent land at a fair price. That night, in bed, I count fingers. 'We know four people who'd love vacations in Transylvania. We'll offer a deal. Timeshare. We'll send them photos. Get it?' Angela is curled up. She nods and grunts. Got it.

As it turns out, come April, we see more than lambs. We see land beyond our wildest dreams, a perfect plot on a gentle slope. At the top of it, Angela says: 'My God, the view.'

We stand in fragrant grass, gawping like idiots. Transylvania stretches before us in rolling waves of forest and pasture. To our left, the mountains of Bucegi soar to the sky in a wall of grey, flecked white with late snow. To our right looms the steep limestone ridge of Piata Craiului garnished with fluffy clouds. It's a spectacular plot in the National Park and probably expensive, but it would make a beautiful place for a new home, far from bonkers Bucharest.

'The view, yes,' says Emil like he created it on the Sixth and rested on the Seventh.

'How much?' says Angela, leaning on her walking stick, breathing hard from the hike.

Emil chews his lip, apparently doing sums in his head. '€12 per square meter.'

Angela and I glance at each other. Perhaps we misheard. 'Why so cheap?'

'The owner's in a hurry to sell.'

We smile in silent wonder. I gesture like Moses. 'The Promised Land. Behold.'

'Behave,' says Angela, 'There must be a catch.'

Emil says: 'No catch. He owns lots of land around here. He's a decent fellow.'

'Who is?' says Angela but Emil is already poking at his mobile, keen to close the deal.

He cocks an ear, waiting. 'Name's Romeo. Line's busy. But he always calls back, for this.'

While we wait on the slope for Farmer Romeo to make contact, Angela phones New York and I phone UK. I feel like a stockbroker caught in the giddy rush for gain but we are not speculating on

oil or copper. This is for beautiful peaks, silent nights, family visits.

A fat bee snuggles into a daisy. A lone hawk rides a thermal. A cowbell clanks in the valley far below. We finish our calls and wink at each other. Our families are onboard. Emil asks me which team I support. I tell him Liverpool and he says: 'Wow, me too.'

Angela gives me a wry smile: yeah right, what a salesman. But her expression changes when she hears Emil's ring tone beeping in his pocket. It's the intro riff from Day Tripper.

'The Beatles,' she says and I nod, scanning the sky. Perhaps our benefactor is watching, pulling strings. Emil takes the call. Angela sits on the slope, elbows on her kneecaps. 'Maybe it's a sign from above,' she says, 'But, on the other hand, if this plot is so cheap how come Romeo always calls back? How come Romeo didn't already sell it?' I sit alongside her. The earth below feels warm and welcoming. I'm home. It's destiny. I hope we will buy this land. But I'm not sure how to reply. 'The financial crisis, hard times?'



My wife chews a blade of grass, squinting into the sun.

Romeo turns up at Emil's office next day. He's in his mid-30s, unshaven and wears baggy corduroys and heavy boots that afford him a lumbering gait. He moves slowly, the hardy mountain man who doesn't give a rat's ass for town life. I like him already. The chunky woollen sweater looks local, hand-knitted. I used to have one too, very warm in cold weather but itchy as hell. I think he looks cool. But I can tell from Angela's cautious demeanour that she has doubts.

We're sitting around a desk. Emil's pretty secretary wears a tight skirt that rustles as she serves us strong coffee in little cups. Romeo has big hands and baby blue eyes. He watches the girl with a lazy smile. He speaks calmly in a baritone voice, meeting our gaze and most of our conditions for buying his land: Water source? Electricity? Do you have an access road, Romeo?

'Sure,' says Romeo, 'Do you have €22,000 in cash?'



Angela nods. 'With a little help from our friends.'

'It's a good price,' says Romeo.

'Too good to be true.'

'Because I'm in a hurry.'

'Then we have a deal?' says Emil, twinkle eyed. He can smell commission already.

Romeo drives us to his notary and we sign lots of documents. We sit in comfy chairs, waiting our turn. Romeo tells us he bought lots of land years ago, when prices were low. Now he's selling up, doing well. He cracks jokes about the envious locals. 'They seem to forget that I studied the market, I worked hard. I have an MBA, speak four languages. My dad was a businessman. I grew up abroad, mostly Italy. You probably thought I was a peasant, right?'

Right now, I don't know what to think, because Angela says something is not right. She speaks quickly in Romanian, pointing at topographical drawings, something about the access road. Romeo looks hurt. His hand is on my knee. 'All is in order. Here Mike, you see?'

I see reams of legal documents. I watch the notary phoning the surveyor. All is in order.

We go to the bank, draw out the cash and hand it to Romeo. We shake hands. He has a good grip and sincere smile. Emil asks about commission and Romeo tells him, politely, to get lost. Emil howls like a dog and storms off, cursing. 'You cheat, you shitbag!'

Angela looks at me and then at Romeo. 'Why didn't you pay Emil? We did.'

'Long story,' says Romeo, climbing into his shiny Range Rover. 'Enjoy the view.'

On the train back to Bucharest, we treat ourselves to a meal in the dining car. We phone Farmer Petre and say surprise, surprise, we'll soon be neighbours, we've bought a piece of land.

'From Romeo Vasile? That *şmecher*?' says Petre.

We sit in silence trying to remember whose idea it was. Şmecher? It's not the worst insult in

Romanian, but it's close. We sip espresso and wonder if Farmer Petre is an envious yokel.

***

We're standing knee deep in fragrant wildflowers. It's August. The Promised Land stretches before us — lush meadows dotted with grazing sheep and, high above us, snow-flecked mountains, as far as the digital camera can see. Human ashes, however, are a bit of a let down.

Just fine grey dust, scooped from some fireplace. I open my plastic bag and shake them free.

'Thanks, Dave, welcome to Transylvania.' The ashes spiral and drift, across the universe.

A middle-aged woman interrupts our magical mystery, yelling at us from the next field. She is skinny and dressed in black, how appropriate.



Angela plods towards her and I follow. The woman's name is Flori. She wants to know who we are, what the hell we think we're doing.

'We bought some land, up there,' says Angela, pointing, 'We're from Bucharest.'

'I can tell,' says Flori, 'Perhaps you should buy the land below it, too. My land.''No thanks,' says Angela, 'We got enough from Romeo Vasile.

Flori smiles, her gold tooth glinting. 'Buy mine too or I'll block your access road.'

'We already have an access road.'

'That's what you think, Missy. That şmecher Romeo promised me all sorts. Next time I see him, I'll put my axe in his head.' Flori grins and walks away, towards a ramshackle cottage.

Angela looks at me. I look uphill. A rabbit is hopping around, like it owns the place.

***

The office of the local council has been refurbished with EU funds, and everyone who works here is smiling at us as we trek along corridors and up three flights to the top floor. We're not used to smiles. When people smile in Bucharest, it's probably because you fell on your ass.

In the Mayor's room, Angela states our case and says: 'Did we miss something?'

The Mayor confers with a lawyer in jeans and an overweight secretary in a polyester frock. Eventually, he tugs at his sharp cuffs and clears his throat. We missed something.

'The contract is illegal,' says the Mayor, 'Mr. Vasile should not have sold you his land without an access road. Probably why you got it cheaply.'

'Cheaply?' I say, trying not to laugh. Or cry.

Angela rubs her temple. 'The notary and surveyor told us everything was in order.'

The Mayor shrugs.



***

We arrive back in Bucharest and shuffle through crowds at Gara de Nord. A few yards ahead, I spot a mucky kid from our train. Two hours ago he was a sad-eyed cripple sliding down the corridor and begging on his backside. Now he's strolling along cocky as hell, smoking and flicking ash. I watch it fall, and picture Dave sleeping with the worms in the Promised Land.

Outside the station we grab a taxi and listen to a slow Beatles' song on the driver's radio. Violins swirl around Paul McCartney's wistful voice. He's singing from an old English lullaby:

Golden slumbers fill your eyes

Smiles await you when you rise

The song is from the final album with the iconic photo of The Beatles walking across Abbey Road. They were young gods in 1969, but tonight honking traffic and a screaming Suzuki drowns their soothing music. A young motorcyclist does a wheelie and soars into the night.

I'm tired of Bucharest. I want to live somewhere quiet. I reach for Angela's hand and close my eyes as we cross the relentless city. I picture something else.

I'm 11 years old in Liverpool. Cousin Dave visits. He has a trendy moustache and shiny black shoes. He roots in our record collection until he finds Abbey Road. He points at the album cover — the photo of The Beatles on the zebra crossing — and speaks to me in a whisper:
See Ringo's shoes, Mikey? I'm wearing them, right now, look.

I stare down at Dave's feet. It's hard to believe.

[Written in English]



Paul Sohar

Hiking in the Harghita



the trail you detect on a distant slope
may turn out to be a dimple
produced by a casual grin
an unintended twitch
on the face of the mountain
when you drag your boots up there

while the deeply furrowed trail inscribed
into a bed of wild flowers surely
maps the life of the landscape
and channels the traffic
of sober tradition;

just follow the hoof prints

and in the morning they will
lead you to green pastures
and in the evening
back into the valley of shadows

[Written in English]



Andrew Fincham



Azuga

There must be mountains
We can have no other way

Here dark installs itself
no faster than a sharp stone
tumbles through a waterfall

stacked pedestals of rock
lie flat against the icicles

the black branched path
will disappear beneath our feet

inside we await
cold wrapped by breath
the rose glow morning
on the snow white wall

[Written in English]

Grete Tartler

Iulie

Primii maci –
răsărind prin asfaltul bucureştean
peste generații de ziduri de pivnițe.

Primii maci de când ai plecat
Macul
e opiu pentru popoare.



July

First poppies –
growing through the asphalt of Bucharest
over generations of cellar-walls.

First poppies since you are gone.
Poppy
is opium for the peoples.

[Translated into English by the author]



Saviana Stănescu

Stolen Taste



What's that?

She stops.

It's a pair of eyes, dark ones, reminding her of something. Clara scrutinizes the Gypsy guy selling perfumes displayed on a blanket on the pavement. He's ogling at her. His eyebrows seem familiar. He smiles widely, exposing the black hole of a missing front tooth, and sticks his cigarette in that empty space. Clara's blue contact lens drag her into a surprising focus on his lips. That skinny curly-haired man with an intense gaze resembles her father. He must be in his late 30s, like *tata* when he died. Another hard-core chain-smoker with a lung cancer looming in the shade?

He stares at her with a playful devil-may-care look.

'Wanna buy a perfume, my lady? I've got only first hand merchandise, from Italy, for classy *donna* like you.'

She inspects the perfumes — cheap replicas, fakes, street vendors in Times Square sale that kind of stuff for 5 bucks or so.

'They are not originals', she tells the guy.

'Of course they are', he answers, parting his lips broader, and broader…



He takes an imitation of Chanel in his left hand, keeps smoking with the right one, and stretches out his left arm towards Clara, gesturing to her to come closer, he wants to tell her a secret. She leans towards him, the sharp smell of his sweat invading her nostrils. Even his brazen odor reminds her of *tata*. Weird. She wonders how this Gypsy's perspiration would taste. That's an awful thought, truly inappropriate. But she gets closer and closer, until he can whisper in her ear:

'This one is for real. I took it myself from the bag of a snotty *donna*, on a train to Firenze. I only steal from the rich and the stuck-up.'

She jerks away, improperly amused, what's going on? — his eyes cling to hers:

'C'mon, beautiful, gimme 35 bucks, OK, for you only 30, huge discount coz you're so hot and you have a good heart too, I can tell, gimme 30, I need money for a train ticket to Italy, gotta go back, I wanna do honest work, cross my heart, but I need money to get there, money to live there until I find work, please my queen, gimme 25 bucks and this original perfume is yours!'

'Well, I don't actually need it, I have my own perfume at home.'

'Then take it for your mom, your friend, your cousin. It's a great gift and you like to give gifts, you have a heart of gold, and you're smart, you can tell this' a bargain, c'mon, gimme 20 bucks, princess!

'I'm sorry, I don't need it.'

'Don't be a pussy, princess, help someone in need, help your people, don't you think I didn't notice, you're our sort, you're a Gypsy too, sweetheart, now don't be snotty and forget your roots, help your man here, help me, honey!'

OK, that's really too much, the guy has crossed a few taboo boundaries.

She rushes away from him, his voice hanging down her back:

'You hot little coward pussy!'

Clara is almost running until she finally gets out of the peasants' market. Far away from that rude cheap



perfume vendor. She stops in front of a newly built Transylvania Bank. Hmmm, a cool building. Very Soho. She looks through the glass. Innovative design, orange chairs, black tables... Air-conditioned. Tellers in expensive business suits… they seem polite. Now that's a progress.

She remembers arriving in the capital with her husband John, only yesterday, that first stroll downtown, his pointing out some youngsters in a café on Lipscani Street, leisurely smoking hookah: 'So many cross-influences over here. You Romanians… hard to define.' Then her response: ' Well, they're a unique mixture of Latin temper, Slavic melancholia, Balkan resourcefulness and Oriental sensuality. Spiced up with some bright Gypsy colours.' And his commending her for the insight.

'Intriguing answer, darling', the confident professorial tone, another A+, yes, married for five years, she's got a PhD too, yet he still can't stop 'grading' her… But why 'they're', she nags herself, why did she say 'they' — the Romanians? Why not 'we'?

Clara catches a glimpse of herself in the fancy window. 'What a wrinkled face. You think too much! That's an old face. And only 36. So that's what 10 years in America does to you… No, it's not your face. Whose then? The heat is playing tricks on her mind. That woman… She's scary. Well. Uncanny, perhaps. And yet… familiar. Ah, but of course. It's her. You know her, don't you...'

She's seven. Dad, *tata,* is taking her on a secret journey. 'Swear you won't tell anyone', and she didn't, a good girl, always kept a promise. He's driving her to the outskirts of Piteşti, an industrial town 100 km from Bucharest.

He leaves the car on the asphalted street and they start walking on the grass, through a rich forest, until they get into a clearing smelling of fresh leaves and heavy cooked meals. Petals and sausages. Birds and BBQ.

A camp of gypsies is there: children playing and running naked in an Eden of garbage; a few dark men sitting around an improvised table made of boxes and wood, smoking their royal pipes; a couple of women with long braids and rainbow-coloured ruffled skirts joyously hanging out, sensuously sitting on the grass like on



unmade beds.

They don't seem to mind *tata* and her at all. They're like 'hello, ma man!' 'hey, brother!', 'are you hungry?', but daddy doesn't answer, he asks 'where's the ol' hag, Ma' Narcisa?'. They point out at a wagon under a big walnut tree. Ma' Narcisa is studying a boy's left palm, digging into his fortune: 'The beans might lie, but the palm can't lie cuz it's yours…' Then she sees Clara and her dad and a big smile lightens up her face, showing off a mouth full of glittering golden teeth. Despite her atrocious dental 'medals', Ma' Narcisa isn't an old hag, she must be in her late 40s, Clara can't tell, but the dark Gypsy woman commends her respect instantly. 'You brought the girl!', she shrieks at *tata*, 'Look at her, she's got my eyes!'.

'Just tell her the fortune, that's why I brought her here'.

'Heh, heh, you little asshole, I love you so much, you mister Big Dick now, c'mon, bring her closer, show mama your little hand, princess!'

Fearless, Clara shows her left palm, she's feeling pleasantly comfortable and protected in this woman's presence. Ma' Narcisa takes her hand, caresses it, rubs it, opens it like a flower, then begins to scan those lines speaking the language of destiny. Her face brightens up again, it's luminous now, it's glowing:

'She has a great future this girl, she has, I see travels, I see wealth, I see love, I see beauty, I see luck! You're born from a golden egg of the ol' Ma' Goose. You're blessed, fate has blessed you and I bless you too! May you have a beautiful life, may you be a princess all your life, may you be pretty and smart and have everyone love you! But remember what Ma' Narcisa is saying now, remember this: never trap anything or let yourself be trapped by anything. If you do so, you lose your luck. No trap, girl, remember that, no trap.'

Maybe five or six or more minutes have passed since Clara was staring at herself in the bank's window. 'I can't look like Ma' Narcisa, I and *tata* never talked about her ever since, she can't be my…, she's just an old witch, this is getting too silly', Clara thinks, turning around as she hears a growing noise from the peasants' market. She sees a bunch of people running in her direction:

‘Catch him! Catch the dirty gypsy! Catch the thief!’

What’s going on? Four or five men seize someone, put him down… they’re now hitting the guy with their fists, they kick him… like stray dogs fighting for a piece of raw meat… they bark too!



John is running towards them, his hand clenched on to a plastic bag with tomatoes, swinging ridiculously back and forth:

‘Don’t kill him! We have to call the Police! Stop hitting him!’

The men cease the ‘fire’ reluctantly, lift the guy from the pavement and carry him towards Transylvania Bank. Now she can see clearly. It’s him, it’s the Gypsy perfume seller. Blood on his dark eyes and a battlefield grin distorting his sensuous mouth.

Her husband walks up to her. ‘What happened, John?”, she asks.’

‘That moron stole my wallet, someone saw it, shouted at him, he started to run. We have to get the Police here.’

‘Oh my God, John.’

‘Don’t worry, we caught him. I got my wallet back.’

‘He has blood on his face!’

‘He got people angry, I couldn’t stop them. Anyway, a little lesson for thieves doesn’t hurt. The community reacted. Vox populi.’

The men are shoving the ogre vendor inside Transylvania bank. John follows them:

‘I must help them. You stay here. Take this.’ He hands her the bag with tomatoes.

John fell in love with the fleshy Romanian tomatoes, declaring that the US ones have no taste and no smell, you might as well chew plastic. The boldest statement he ever made…

Clara watches through the window how those ugly men push her gypsy perfume seller inside a teller’s room and lock it from outside. They can’t decide who should keep the key, so they leave it in the door. Clara



tries to spot her guy through those curtains of glass, but no, she can't, he must be on the floor, bleeding.

The mad men and the bank's employees gesticulate and debate, arguing with their bodies and their mouths in full hate-bloom. They're so disgusting, repulsive! Clara feels an urge to throw tomatoes at them. A gentleman in his 40s, with a threatening potbelly hidden under a silky shirt, comes out of a leathered office door… he must be the boss of this Transylvania branch. The little ad hoc crowd follows the 'gentleman' and the wallet-saviours in that office, dancing a sort of lynching samba.

They're probably gonna make that call to the Police and write some collective declaration of hate, anger and honest citizenship determined to eliminate the thieves from society. Jesus, another gloriously inappropriate thought, Clara worries, wondering what's wrong with her. Today's events seem to have an ethereal overtone that lures her down a rabbit hole… 'Jetlag, I feel so freakin' tired, I should have taken a nap… *sa trag un pui de somn*…' She bursts into laughter. The word-to-word translation of the Romanian expression is — to shoot a baby of sleep. 'We Romanians are crazy! We…'

She sees him through the walls of glass. He's propping himself up against the teller's office. His mouth is still sad and angry, but his eyes, where are his eyes?… He wipes the blood with the back of his hand and... How peculiar. There's a playful light in the corner of his eyes. 'Don't you understand, they got you, you're going to prison!' — she'd like to shout at him but she can't. She can only stare with an intensity that turns louder and louder, like a car alarm in her ears. He catches her gaze, tickling the silence between them with that tricky light in his eyes, and shrugs. His shoulders raise and fall as a smile of acceptance conquers his face. 'That's it, love', he seems to say, and she looks at him and doesn't want to 'be it'. He mouthes 'bye, princess', 'Gypsy princess', and she knows she's gonna do something awful now, but can't stop, it's impossible to stop.

'Never trap anything or let yourself be trapped by anything', that fortune-teller — maybe her grandma? — said, her words drilling now in Clara's mind as she runs in, into that modern air-conditioned bank, to the teller's office door, and doesn't hesitate. She unlocks it. She opens it. His playful eyes smile, a 'that's my girl' kinda smile,



and she can't say anything to him but: run! And he doesn't. He falls to his knees, completely surprising her, and no, it can't be that, but yes, it is, he kisses her hand. A long, horny kiss. Run, run! — she whispers, or maybe she doesn't. And he gets up indeed, stops smiling, blows her a kiss, and yes, he does, he runs out of the trap.

Clara takes a tomato out of the plastic bag and begins to eat it voraciously, tomato juice spreading around her mouth.

She knows now: she's gotta get out too. Before she becomes one with the calm reliable civilized walls of her own perfect American dream trap.

[Written in English]

A. Bo

Instant Man



Born in a moment
Raised in a flash
Coming up solvent
Like Leus in mash

Spark in your Cables
Flash in your pan
Funk in your Fables
Instant Man.

Pop-up new person
You have in a paste
Commie inversion
Free-market haste

Your perfect purple

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014



Political mince
Pink in the parlour
Blue in the rinse

Living in Cluj
New cradle and grave:
The deep-freeze fridge
And the micro-wave

Filtered from bullshit
Flavoured with lead
King-size ego
Flip-top head.

[Written in English]

Traian T. Coşovei

Să plouă!

—Cum ploua, Nichita?
—*Ploua infernal.*

Mă urc în autobuz de la Piața Dorobanți. E ora 12 .
Prin geamul murdar, strada mă arată cu degetul.
În fața vitrinei cu mirese tăcute
un bătrân mănâncă pâine.

—Cum zici că ploua, Nichita?
—*Ploua infernal.*

Pe scaunul din fața mea se aşează o fetiță.
Are o pelerină roşie de la armata salvării
şi un ghiozdan foarte mic.
Atât de mic încât nu i-ar încăpea în el niciun vis, nicio

Let It Rain!

— How was it raining, Nichita?
—*It was raining like hell.*

I get on the bus at Dorobanți Square. It's 12 o'clock.
Through the dirty window, the street is pointing at me.
In front of the the shop window with silent brides
an old man is eating bread.

—How did you say it was raining, Nichita?
—*It was raining like hell.*

The seat in front of me is occupied by a little girl.
She has a red cape from The Salvation Army
and a very small satchel.
It is so small that it could not hold any dream or despair.

disperare.
Şi aşa, n-o să viseze prea mult
pentru că o să fie o femeie urâtă.
Va face carieră, nu înainte de a se încurca cu un golan
care o va dezvirgina prost.

„Tacsu' a luat-o razna!" —
mormăie bunica fetiței de pe scaunul din stânga mea.

—Cum zici că ploua, măi, Nichita?
—*Ploua infernal*.

Cobor în Romană.
O maşină neagră mă stropeşte cu noroi.
Îmi asum asta ca pe un botez —
ca pe un păcat pe care îl spăl în ape murdare.
Şi plouă.
—Cum dracu' zici că ploua, măi, Nichita?
—*Ploua infernal*.
—Iartă-i, cu mansardele lor cu tot!
Să plouă!

She won't be dreaming too much anyway
because she will be an ugly woman.
She will have a career, but not before she gets mixed up with a wretch who will deflower her badly.

"Her dad's gone mad!"
grumbles the girl's grandmother from the seat on my left.

—Hey! Nichita, how did you say it was raining?
—*It was raining like hell.*

I get off at the Roman Square.
A black car splashes mud on me.
I accept it as a christening —
as a sin that I wash in dirty waters.
And it rains.
—Hey! Nichita, how the hell did you say it was raining?
—*It was raining like hell.*
—Forgive them, forgive their minds!
Let it rain!

[Translated into English by Elena Armă]

Oana-Raluca Răducanu

Love's Labours' Lost



Thank God that when I gave you my heart
It was only metaphorically
Otherwise, now I really would be dead

[Written in English]

CONTEMPORARY
LITERATURE PRESS
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014

Ionel Riți

Epitaph



What dusty time of statu-quo...
I say, my friends, bye-bye to you,
I will remove myself, I'll go,
For one eternity, or... two?!

[Written in English]

Contemporary Literature Press
http://editura.mttlc.ro
București 2014

Notes on Contributors

Fleur Adcock (b. 1934, Auckland) studied Classics at Victoria University in Wellington and taught at the University of Otago. A prolific and award-winning poet, she visited Romania, leaned the language and found Grete Tartler's poetry. Her latest collection is *Dragon Talk* (2010).

Elena Armă (b. Bucharest, 1987) has a degree in English and Spanish Philology and studies under Prof. Lidia Vianu. She has translated poems from English into Romanian for the online magazine *Translation Café* and for the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company.

Christopher Bakken (b. 1967, Wisconsin) has authored two collections: *Goat Funeral* (2006) and *After Greece* (2001), for which he received the T.S. Eliot Poetry Prize. A Fulbright Scholar (Bucharest University 2008). He is an Associate English Professor at Allegheny College, Pennsylvania.

Florin Bican (b. 1956, Bucharest) is a writer, translator and journalist. A native of Bucharest, he contrives to leave for long enough to appreciate the occasional homecoming. He chaperons those who come to Bucharest to understand, appreciate, and translate Romanian literature.

Alistair Ian Blyth (b. 1970, Sunderland) studied at Cambridge and Durham Universities. In 1999, after working as a teacher in Siberia, he settled in Bucharest where he now translates literary fiction and philosophy.

A. Bo (b. Dreamtime, Ukraine) recently surfaced on Closed Circuit TV, Medieval Flash, and No Tube. Influenced by James Joyce, Relative Caravanning, and *Absolut* Vodka, his scratchings can be peeled off unpublished Bach.

Mircea Cărtărescu (b. 1956, Bucharest) has published poetry, short stories, novels, and essays which have attracted both acclaim and contention.

Dan Mircea Cipariu (b. 1972, Bucharest) studied journalism at Bucharest University. A member of the Romanian Writers Union and poetry president of the Bucharest Writers' Association, his book *Tsunami* received the Writers Asciației Bucharest 2007.

Denisa Comănescu (b. 1954, Buzău, Romania) is a poet, translator, and editor, After Bucharest University she joined Univers Publishing. She won the 1979 Debut Prize of the Romanian Writers Union. Since 1990, she has been the Secretary of the Romanian PEN.

James G. Coon (b. 1950, Cincinnati, USA) is a founding editor of New Europe Writers. Currently a resident of Bangkok, he is a frequent visitor to that wondrous land located between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge.

Flavia Cosma (b. Romania) A Canadian poet with a Masters in electrical engineering, she then studied drama for two years. In Romania she worked in sound for radio and television and now as an independent producer/director/writer for TV documentaries.

Traian T. Coşovei (b. 1954) patronised the Sadoveanu bookshop and developed an interest in Sartre, Camus, Baudelaire, and Faulkner. A free spirit and maverick, his poetry reflects that of Mariana Marin Cărtărescu Mircea Alexandru Muşina, Florin Andrei Iaru, or Bodiu.

Dan Dănilă (b. 1954, Şura Mică, Romania) is a poet, translator, and painter. Living in Leonberg, Germany since 1990, his poems, short stories, translations, and graphics have been published by leading literary magazines in Romania, Germany, Denmark, Canada and the U.S.

Nick Drake (b. 1961) is based in London. His *The Man in the White Suit* won the Forward Prize in 1999, and a novel *Nefertiti: The Book of the Dead* was published in 2006. He has recently adapted Petit's *To Reach the Clouds* for the stage and wrote a screenplay for *Romulus, My Father*.

Helena Drysdale (b. London) studied Art and History at Cambridge and worked at Walker Books before reviewing then editing contemporary art magazine A*rtscribe*. Her works include *Looking for George*, *Mother Tongues, Travels through Tribal Europe,* and *Strangerland.*

Andrew Elliott (b. 1961, Limavady, Co. Derry) lives in Manchester. He was the first recipient of the Allan Dowling Poetry Travelling Fellowship was selected to appear in *Trio Poetry 4* (Blackstaff 1985).

Andrew Fincham (b. 1964, England) is a poet, editor and co-founder of New Europe Writers. His poetry has appeared in over a dozen anthologies. The bilingual *Centre of Gravity* (Ibis 2004) received the UNESCO / Poezja Dzisiaj award for foreign poetry in Poland.

Carmen Firan (b. Romania) has published twenty books of poetry, novels, essays, and short stories. Living in New York since 2000, her writings appear in translations in France, Israel, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Canada, UK, and the USA.

JoAnne Growney grew up in Pennsylvania where the wooded mountains resemble those of Romania. A maths professor, she has

published three collections of poems, including *Red Has No Reason* and co-translated George Bakovia, Ileana Malancioiu, and Nichita Stanescu.

Jean Harris (b. Manhattan) studied literature at Rutgers University. Her published works include *The One-Eyed Doctor*, and a novel, *Diffidence*. She lives in Bucharest where she writes for *Observator Cultural*, directs the Observer Translation Project whilst working on a Romanian memoir.

David Hill (b. England, 1971) lives in Washington and has published *Angels and Astronauts, Bald Ambition,* and *Consumed.* He edits the free poetry quarterly *Lyriklife*. An avid poetry performer, he founded The Budapest Bardroom.

Ioana Ieronim (b. 1947) is a poet, translator, and playwright. She authored *Triumph of the Waterwitch*, short-listed for the Sir Weidenfeld Prize, Oxford. Her collections in English include *Omnivorous Syllables* and *The Lens of a Flame*.

Igor Isakovski (b. 1970, Skopje, Macedonia) is a poet, prose writer, translator, and editor. He has studied Comparative Literature and Gender and Culture (CEU, Budapest, Hungary). He founded the Cultural Institution Blesok.

Sándor Kányádi (b. 1929, Transylvania) has lived his life in Romania where he has endeavoured, through his work as writer, translator, and editor, to keep his language and culture alive amidst an often hostile environment. He is the recipient of many European literature awards.

Dan Lungu (b. 1969, Romania) is a writer, literary theorist and sociologist. His works include short stories *Cheta la flegmă,* the novels *Raiul găinilor* and *Sînt o babă comunistă!* A former editor in chief of the newspaper Timpul, now he lectures at the University of Iaşi.

Alina Miron teaches English/French and is a certified translator. She graduated from Bucharest University where she earned an MA in literary translations. She also translated books for publishing houses and articles and poetry for various magazines.

Gabriela Moateru (b. 1988, Balş) studied at West Timişoara University specializing in English and French Language and Literature. She studies on the MA TCLT Programme at Bucharest University and collaborates with Radio Romania and The Bucharest National Theatre.

Ion Munteanu (b. 1961, Mălăieşti village, Goieşti of Dolj) attended Bucharest University, and taught in Convasna until becoming a journalist in 1984. His works include *Rivers in Flames, Confessions to a Silent Angel* and *In This Friendly Jungle.* He presently lives in Craiova City.

Mike Ormsby (b. 1959, Ormskirk, Merseyside, U.K.) is a writer, editor, and journalism trainer. Romanian literary critics have dubbed him 'our British Caragiale.'

Philip Orr (b. 1955, Belfast) was educated at the University of Ulster. He is currently chairman of the New Ireland Group.

Adrian Păunescu (1943-2010) was a Romanian poet, journalist, and politician. Though criticised for praising dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu, he was called 'Romania's most famous poet' in an Associated Press story quoted in the New York Times.

Ioan Es. Pop (b. 1958, Vãrai, Romania) has a degree in Literature from Baia Mare University. In 1989, he was granted permission to move to Bucharest to worked as a building worker constructing the 'House of the People.' He lives in Bucharest editing *Ziarul de duminică* and *Descoperă*.

Zenovia Popa (b. Călăraşi, Romania, 1978) graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Bucharest. She works as a translator and interpreter and studies at the MTTLC, Bucharest University.

Simona Popescu (b.1965, Codlea, Braşov) Currently teaches contemporary Romanian literature and creative writing at Bucharest University. Author of many volumes of poetry, essays, and one novel. She coordinated a collective novel published as *Rubik* (2008).

Constantin Preda (b. 1961, Damian, Romania) studies journalism at Bucharest University. A member of the Romanian Writers Union, he has edited *The Word of Liberty*, *Gazeta de Sud*, *National*, *7 Plus*, and *Meridian.* He is a the literary and artistic director of S*pecial Edition of Oltenia.*

Ioana-Raluca Răducanu (b. 1981, Cluj-Napoca) is currently an Advertising Art Director. A winner of awards in Romanian Literary Contest, she has written a libretto for an opera called *Harap-Alb*, composed by Anamaria Meza.

Raluca Rodica Rațiu (b.1982 Arad, Romania 1982) studies Law in Italy. She writes poems in Italian, Romanian, and English and competes in national and international literary contests. In 2008 she was a guest at the Carribean Literary Festival and collaborates with Jamaican poets.

Ionel (Johnny) **Riți (**b. Transylvania, 1955) is a civil engineer from Brasov and graphic designer. His also authors epigrams and crossword squares.

Jennifer Robertson (b. The Orkneys, U.K.) has lived in Edinburgh, St Petersburg, Warsaw, and Barcelona. She has authored of 25 books, including poetry (*Ghetto, Beyond the Border, Loss and Language*) and prose (*Don't Go to Uncle's Wedding – Voices of the Warsaw Ghetto*).

Constantin Roman (b. Romania) is a scientist and linguist, educated at the Bucharest University and at Cambridge> He has lived in France, Norway, Holland, and Indonesia. His home is London, where he contrives to indulge (albeit with limited success) in serendipity and esotericism.

Doina Ruşti grew up in Comoşteni, Romania. She has authored prize-winning novels, including *The Little Red Man, Convorbiri literare, Zogru,* and *Fantoma din Moară.*

Paul Sohar (b. Hungary) drifted as a young refugee to the US where he obtained a BA in philosophy and worked as a lab assistant. Translation helped him break into print, including Kenyon Rattle and Seneca Reviews, and *Dancing Embers,* Sandor Kanyadi in translation.

Adam J. Sorkin won the 2005 Translation Prize of The Poetry Society (UK) for Marin Sorescu's *The Bridge*, translated with Lidia Vianu. His recent books of translation include Ruxandra Cesereanu's *Crusader-Woman* and Mariana Marin's *The Factory of the Past,* translated with Daniela Hurezanu.

Saviana Stănescu (b. Bucharest) was born during Ceausescu's dictatorship and 'reborn' in New York. Performed both in the US and internationally, her recent plays include: *Aliens with extraordinary skills, Waxing West, and YokastaS Redux*, (with Richard Schechner).

Bogdan Suceavă (b. 1969, Romania) is Associate Mathematics Professor at California State University. He writes short stories, including recently translated: *Daddy Wants TV Saturday Night*, *Natural Bridge*, *Rubik Cube Story*, and *Grandpa Got Back to French.*

Stelian Tănase (b. 1952, Bucharest, Romania) first novel *The Luxury of Melancholy* was published in 1982. Currently working as a

television presenter, he teaches political science at the University of Bucharest. His novel, *Maestro: A Melodrama*, appeared this year, and he recently finished a new novel, *Pavlov's Dogs*.

Grete Tartler (b. 1948, Romania) has published 12 volumes of poetry in Romanian and German, and much literature for children. She lives in Bucharest.

Lucian Dan Teodorovici (b. 1975) is the co-ordinator of Polirom's '*Ego. Prose*' series and edits *Suplimentul de cultură*. Former editor-in-chief at Jassy, he scripts the *Animated Planet Show*, and has written screenplays for the feature-length film adaptation of *Our Circus Presents.*

Călin Torsan was first discovered on the cover of a book of the Old Court, *Small and Medium Business Stories*. He has also been published in *The Book of Waste*, *School of Martyrs,* and the *Recycle Right*.

Lidia Vianu (b. 1947, Romania) is a poet, novelist, critic, and translator and Professor of Contemporary British Literature at Bucharest University. Winner of the 2005 Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation from the Poetry Society (UK), she is the director of *Contemporary Literature Press* (http://editura.mttlc.ro/).

The **University of Bucharest** is supporting the largest up to date
Finnegans Wake Lexicographic Series:

A Manual for the Advanced Study of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*
in One Hundred and OneVolumes

by **C. George Sandulescu and Lidia Vianu**

at *Contemporary Literature Press*:

http://editura.mttlc.ro/Joyce%20Lexicography.html
http://sandulescu.perso.monaco.mc/







CONTEMPORARY
LITERATURE PRESS
http://editura.mttlc.ro
Bucureşti 2014